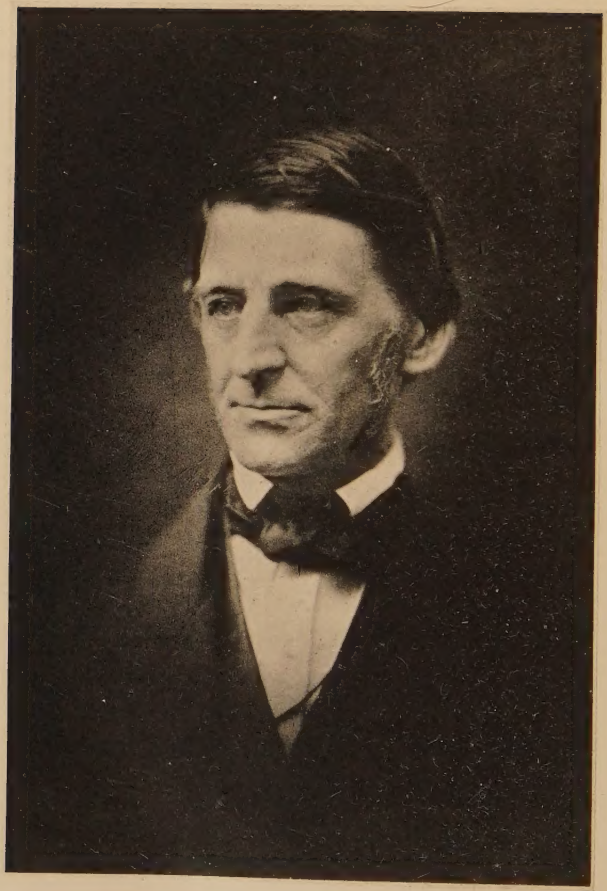
Saint
Paul
Public
Library

THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY

WITHDRAWN

REMEMBRANCES *of* EMERSON



REMEMBRANCES *of* EMERSON

BY

JOHN ALBEE

364390

STORAGE
PUBLIC LIBRARY

NEW YORK
ROBERT GRIER COOKE
1903

Copyright, 1901, *by*
John Albee

Copyright, 1903, *by*
Robert Grier Cooke

PS
429
E53Z3

ST. PAUL
PUBLIC LIBRARY

From the Press of
Robert Grier Cooke

TO

EDWARD WALDO EMERSON

CONTENTS

A Day with Emerson 9

Emerson's Influence on the Young Men of his Time 65

Emerson as Essayist 133

PREFACE

EMERSON'S life and the influence of his books make a large subject, and it would have been easily possible to have extended these pages to a much greater length; but I preferred to limit my effort and to condense what I had to say into a brief compass. I have an aversion to long, laborious and usually frigid biographies. Let them come from the heart and from sincere admiration, and who does not read them with sympathy? I prefer Xenophon's artless yet affectionate memories of Socrates to the voluminous records of Plato. It is not that I like the philosopher less, but the man, the citizen, the soldier, the humorist more. I

sometimes suspect the portrayal by Plato, never that of Xenophon.

It may be anticipated that future readers will be able to gather a clearer conception of the man and the ideas which he represented from the various brief personal narratives of Emerson's contemporaries and witnesses of his actual influence upon them than from the more distant and conventional biographies. It seems to me also that the spiritual history of the latter half of the nineteenth century is reflected in Emerson's life.

I shall be happy if I can contribute something to his memory and fortunate in that this little book reappears at a moment when it can join in the centennial commemorations of Emerson's birthday.

The following pages do not pretend

to be a new valuation of Emerson, but a record of his influence and its effects upon the thoughtful young men of his time. Neither does it concern itself much with personal recollections, with one exception which may be pardoned to the adventurous spirit of youth.

I call to remembrance simply the known annals of his life and work in their relation to my own generation.

I have no claim to long or intimate personal acquaintance with Emerson. My elders and distinguished contemporaries were more fortunate than myself in this respect; yet nothing could prevent my sharing with them his lectures, his essays and poems and the general intellectual movement which acknowledged him as its leader. By a sort of instinct, or whatever it may be called, I did not fail to become possessed with

the whole spirit and productions of that movement. Thus one comes to the belief that it is indifferent where he dwells or what his fortune; if he have any center in himself there is for him also a circumference with unnumbered radiating lines from one to the other, on whose paths all that toward which his nature most inclines may freely and prosperously pass.

Thus believing and with no personal assumption I call what I have written Remembrances of Emerson.

A DAY WITH EMERSON

A DAY WITH EMERSON

IT is natural to wish for personal communication with great men. We are drawn to them as to a finer climate. Young men seek them with an instinctive hope of receiving a direct gift which will brighten themselves with some beam of greatness; older men divine that only so much as they take with them will they carry away. The confidence of youth is nobler if more inexperienced. In going to celebrated persons results of a singular sort are disclosed; among them disappointment and mortification. Youth recognizes enough of greatness to discover its own littleness. It finds that it cannot come very near

the great man because as yet it has no orbit of its own. At a distance all is compensated by the imagination. At a distance we figure a magnificence in the presence and affairs of genius. What chagrin to find that possibly it has dirty hands and big feet, eats with a knife, with many uncomfortable manners to balk the predisposed admirer. When the genius is predominant it retires to its adytum, whither we cannot follow; we cannot surprise it in the act of being a genius; we remain on the outside with its follies, or flattering equalities. We feel a shadow of regret to see the man whose pages suggest only the fairest ideals living subject to most of the vulgar conditions which torment mankind. Prudence hints that it would be wise to keep away. But we cannot; we

must embrace; we must have speech with the being so like, so unlike, what we are. If we cannot approach the god on his mountain, we may catch him tending his sheep or frolicking on all-fours with his children.

There was more congruity in the presence and conversation of Emerson with the ideal one naturally formed of him than we usually find in our personal intercourse with famous writers. I think this is partly the cause of the powerful impression he made upon his contemporaries. His manner of life, the man himself, was at one with his thought; his thought at one with its expression. There were no paradoxes, none of the supposed eccentricities of genius, to furnish the intolerable ana for future literary scavengers. He spoke of Nature not to add an elegant

ornament to his pages; he lived near to her. In meeting him the disappointments, if any there were, one found in himself. For he measured men so that they became aware of their own stature, not oppressively, but by a flashing, inward self-illumination, because he placed something to their credit that could not stand the test of their own audit.

The little contribution I wish to make to the Emerson memorabilia concerns a time so remote that I may be pardoned its personalities. It concerns a time which now seems like a dream; and yet it was the time when a cherished dream of youth was fulfilled. It concerns a boy who had never heard of Emerson until he read "Representative Men"; who could find none to tell him whether the book was by

a living or dead writer, whether by an American or Englishman; and in vain did he seek for some one who had read it and could sympathize with his own feeling in regard to it. Fortunately; for if that little Puritan community to which the boy belonged had known Emerson he would have been anathema, and the boy's troubles would have begun prematurely. Communities and churches now claim the dead sage; formerly they would not tolerate even those who read him in silence. How much we are changed before we change. How often we forget, forgive and at last praise what we once condemned. It became the fashion to listen to Emerson's lectures and to ask what they meant; or to refer to some one who professed to understand them. The enchantment

of his voice and presence moved nearly all auditors to a state of exaltation like fine music, and like the effects of music it was a mood hard to retain. It needed a frequent repetition, and those who heard him oftenest at length became imbued with the spirit of his teachings and could appropriate as much as belonged to them; and some who doubtless carried away but little were self-pleased and thought they saw a new light. A small farmer of Concord told me proudly that he had heard every one of Emerson's lectures delivered in that town; and after a moment's hesitation he added, "And I understood 'em, too." I believed him; for there is something superior to speech revealed to the ignorant.

I remember a day when I stood idly over a counter looking at the backs of

what seemed to be newly published books. I drew out one, bound in plain black muslin. Its title, "Representative Men," attracted me, because I had just been reading Plutarch's Lives, and for the first time had been aroused by the reading of any book. Those Greek and Roman men moved my horizon some distance from its customary place. The titles of the books were at least cousins, and I wondered if there had been any representative men since Epaminondas and Scipio. I opened the volume at the beginning, "Uses of Great Men," and read a few pages, becoming more and more agitated, until I could read no more. It was as if I had looked in a mirror for the first time. I turned around, fearful lest some one had observed what had happened to me; for a complete revelation was

opened in those few pages, and I was no longer the same being that had entered the shop. These were the words for which I had been hungering and waiting. This was the education I wanted — the message that made education possible and study profitable, a foundation and not a perpetual scaffolding. These pages opened for me a path, and opened it through solid walls of ignorance and the limiting environment of a small country academy.

All that is now far, far away, and seems, indeed, an alien history; yet, however much one may have wandered among famous books, it would be ungrateful not to remember the one book which was the talisman to all its fellows. The first work we read with an ardent mental awakening teaches us

how to read, and gives to us a power of divination in the choice of reading. One by one we grapple with these books, exhaust their first magical influence over us, and by these assimilations build up our own structure.

I should be glad to read Emerson's volumes again for the first time; I cannot recover the old sensation. I open them memorially. Perchance, I may like the author I am reading better; but Emerson's generative power one recognizes in many a successor. If you have lived in and through his volumes you never will be satiated while there is still in the world a good book to be read or to be written. They create an immortal appetite and expectation.

I closed the volume of "Representative Men" and put it back in its place, but I could not leave it there, nor could

I afford to purchase it. I inquired the price. "Seventy-five cents," was the answer. That was a princely sum to the poor student who, to eke out his schooling, received just that amount per week for delivering a daily newspaper to sundry subscribers. The glance the clerk gave my shabby coat indicated he had measured my poverty. I fingered the money reluctantly, yet not seeing any other copy of the book and fearing that if I lost this opportunity I might never see it again, I could no more resist the inclination to possess it than to drink at a spring when thirsty. The true value of money depends upon that for which you exchange it, as I have always found when it is exchanged for a good book. If you draw a mark of equality between "Representative Men" and seventy-five cents you will see how much richer I

was with the book than with the money. This was the first volume that I bought with my own money, and none since has educated me so much and none now pleases me so well to see with its broken back and bent corners, its general look of shabbiness, worn with much packing and travel, and its scribblings on the wide margins made in the days when I read it with ambitious zeal and began to feel wise and melancholy, and even to think I could piece out Emerson's sentences with reflections of my own.

I read this book until I had drawn out as much as there was for me at that time. It seemed to be written for me. Youth is full of remarkable discoveries and affinities. Nothing looks its hoary age, nor hints to fresh young life that his is not a peculiar experience, but is merely one of the unnumbered coinci-

dences in human existence; otherwise we should be born old, or seeing the monotonous revolution should not wish to live. We begin with an enormous appetite for the spectacle, and soon wish to become a part of it. Everything solicits us to be an actor, even our dreams. I did not comprehend "Representative Men" in the sense of mastering the printed page; but what one finds in books is not always a comprehension of them; it is sometimes provocation, the winged impulse toward the light, toward mental activity and self-expression and a communion with all that is strong and lovely. To this end some books seem to designate themselves with an especial character and emphasis.

It was not long before other of Emerson's writings came to light; and I cannot help remarking here how an

ingenuous and instinctive appetite is fated to find its congenial nutriment. What belongs to us is also seeking us. Emerson was the prophet of young men, and his voice had the marvellous faculty of reaching them in the most obscure and unexpected places. Usually this was followed by some sort of personal intercourse. The enterprise of young men is to possess the thing they love. Possession cools this ardor, and soon enough we care for the book rather than the author, when we can, unhindered by the intoxicating personality, calmly weigh its work. I believe Emerson liked to meet those whom his books had reached and moved. He was always accessible and gracious. His manners — how shall one speak justly of them! They were those of the finest women one has ever seen or heard, blended with those

magnificent moments in the lives of ancient sages and demigods which make the ideals of human intercourse. They were triumphant and just a little oppressive in their novelty until one had adjusted himself to them. His presence and conversation were a few more pages out of the essays on Heroism, Poetry, Love, Circles and Great Men; so that when you arrived at his door you entered the same house that you left behind in his books.

After I had read in Emerson for some time I had the boldness to write to him and the good fortune to be answered. In my note I had solicited his opinion in regard to college education. I will quote so much of his reply as is not personal: "To a brave soul it really seems indifferent whether its tuition is in or out of college. And yet I confess to a strong

bias in favor of college. I think we cannot give ourselves too many advantages; and he who goes to Cambridge has free the best of that kind. When he has seen their little all he will rate it very moderately beside that which he brought thither. There are many things much better than a college; an exploring expedition if one could join it; or the living with any great master in one's proper art; but in the common run of opportunities and with no more than the common proportion of energy in ourselves, a college is safest, from its literary tone and from the access to books it gives — mainly that it introduces you to the best of your contemporaries. But if you can easily come to Concord and spend an afternoon with me we could talk over the whole case by the river bank."

I had not then the courage nor the opportunity to accept his friendly invitation. But the next year, being not far from Concord, at the Phillips Academy of Andover, I thought the time had come. Life there had become insupportable; I was ready to abandon college education unless encouraged by some other arguments than those I could draw from the character of the preparation. My only intimate at Andover, William T. Harris, the philosopher, had been able to escape betimes and left me without a companion. Necessity compelled me to remain if I wished to go to college. While Harris was there we contrived, amid a crowd of youth in all stages of preparation for the ministry, to maintain several starveling muses. With two flutes, a small telescope, much poetry and the beginnings of that philosophy

which Mr. Harris has since so splendidly fulfilled, we nourished our aspirations and all the indefinable emotions of youth. We found or made tunes to many of Tennyson's lyrical poems and sang them in our long walks together over the Andover hills, neglecting Homer and Virgil, whom we were not taught to read for any purpose save the drill in exceptions and construction.

I had now a precise object and need of seeing Emerson. I thought he could advise me how to become educated and where. For the school offered nothing I craved. Its methods were brutal and monkish; its regimen, that is, its dormitories and commons-table had barely kept some thousands of dyspeptic alumni in this world (and had sent I know not how many to the other), and maintained thereby the chief bulwark of a bad creed,

a bad digestion. One of its disciples confessed to me that he got up in the morning a Unitarian, but toward night the gnawing in his stomach brought him back to Orthodoxy.

I therefore set out one damp day in May, 1852, in search of the oracle that was to answer my questions and be to me the voice of destiny. What trepidations and misgivings! The self-conscious student is thinking what sort of a figure he will cut; he remembers his youth and its insignificance to any but himself; and the greatness of the great is vastly exaggerated by the comparison. It seemed to me I was going to speak with a being, who, like the person in Plutarch's story, only conversed with men one day in the year; the remainder he spent with the nymphs and dæmons; and that day, for the current

year, had been allotted to me. The fact that I went clandestinely, that Emerson's name and books were never mentioned nor known by any one in my world, and that I was wholly unaware of the other members of his circle, called sometimes the Transcendentalists, or their works and influence, probably added a certain zest to the adventure. At the gate of the well-known walk it would have been easier to retreat than to enter. Such is the experience of those about to grasp what they have long awaited and desired. I went on, however, as one in the end always does. I entered, and giving my name, was welcomed in a manner that at once banished embarrassment.

Thoreau was already there. I think he had ended his experiment at Walden Pond some years before. Thoreau was

dressed, I remember, in a plain, neat suit of dark clothes, not quite black. He had a healthy, out-of-door appearance, and looked like a respectable husbandman. He was rather silent; when he spoke, it was in either a critical or a witty vein. I did not know who or what he was; and I find in my old diary of the day that I spelled his rare name phonetically, and heard afterward that he was a man who had been a hermit. I observed that he was much at home with Emerson; and as he remained through the afternoon and evening, and I left him still at the fireside, he appeared to me to belong in some way to the household. I observed also that Emerson continually deferred to him and seemed to anticipate his view, preparing himself obviously for a quiet laugh at Thoreau's negative and biting

criticisms, especially in regard to education and educational institutions. He was clearly fond of Thoreau; but whether in a human way, or as an amusement, I could not then make out. Dear, indeed, as I have since learned, was Thoreau to that household, where his memory is kept green, where Emerson's children still speak of him as their elder brother. In the evening Thoreau devoted himself wholly to the children and the parching of corn by the open fire. I think he made himself very entertaining to them. Emerson was talking to me, and I was only conscious of Thoreau's presence as we are of those about us but not engaged with us. A very pretty picture remains in my memory of Thoreau leaning over the fire with a fair girl on either side, which somehow did not comport with the sub-

sequent story I heard of his being a hermit. Parched corn had for him a fascination beyond the prospect of something to eat. He says in one of his books that some dishes recommend themselves to our imaginations as well as palates. "In parched corn, for instance, there is a manifest sympathy between the bursting seed and the more perfect developments of vegetable life. It is a perfect flower with its petals, like the Houstonia or anemone. On my warm hearth these cerealian blossoms expanded."

I never saw Thoreau again until I heard him deliver in Boston Music Hall his impassioned eulogy on John Brown. Meantime the "Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers" had become one of my favorite books; and I have atoned for my youthful and un-

timely want of recognition by taking from my ocean beach a smooth pebble to his cairn at Walden. I gathered the stone in the ancient pharmaceutical manner, with the spell of one of Thoreau's songs:

"My sole employment 'tis and scrupulous care
To place my gains beyond the reach of tides;
Each smoother pebble, and each shell more rare,
Which ocean kindly to my hand confides."

In the conversation of an afternoon and evening it is impossible to relate all that was said; one thinks he never shall forget a word of such a memorable day; but at length it becomes overlaid in the chambers of the memory and only reappears when un-

called for. I find set down in my diary of the day two or three things which a thousand observers have remarked: that Emerson spoke in a mild, peculiar manner, justifying the text of Thoreau, that you must be calm before you can utter oracles; that he often hesitated for a word, but it was the right one he waited for; that he sometimes expressed himself mystically, and like a book. This meant, I suppose, that the style and subjects were novel to me, being then only used to the slang of schoolboys and the magisterial manner of pedagogues. He seldom looked the person addressed in the eye, and rarely put direct questions. I fancy this was a part of his extreme delicacy of manner.

As soon as I could I introduced the problem I came to propound — what

course a young man must take to get the best kind of education. Emerson pleaded always for the college; said he himself entered at fourteen. This aroused the wrath of Thoreau, who would not allow any good to the college course. And here it seemed to me Emerson said things on purpose to draw Thoreau's fire and to amuse himself. When the curriculum at Cambridge was alluded to, and Emerson casually remarked that most of the branches were taught there, Thoreau seized one of his opportunities and replied: "Yes, indeed, all the branches and none of the roots." At this Emerson laughed heartily. So without conclusions, or more light than the assertions of two representative men can give, I heard agitated for an hour my momentous question.

At that period it seemed to me men acquired by mere industry whatever talents and position they possessed. Anybody could come to greatness by persistent study and effort; we were to be self-made men — that was the popular phrase of the time — regardless of whether the Creator had done little or nothing for us, and we were constantly reminded of Benjamin Franklin and that the way to the White House was always open to the sober and industrious young man. Sobriety and industry and frugality were the three commandments of the farm and the shop; and if the boy left his father's field or bench for college or a profession he was enjoined to exemplify these principles in the exercise of his intellectual faculties and functions as he had been trained to do at home.

I was therefore somewhat confused in my notions regarding education by finding that Emerson, who as I then believed had made himself a great man, was also college bred. Whether from desire to follow his example, or because I was already nearly prepared for college, I found myself involuntarily coinciding with Emerson's views rather than Thoreau's whimsical opinions. Yet Thoreau had been to college; but at some strange epoch in his life he had broken with his past and many of the traditions and conventions of his contemporaries. He had resolved to live according to nature; and had the usual desire to publish the fact and explain the proceeding. It had never, however, the tone of apology; and it is our good fortune that he was not too singularly great to feel the need

of communicating himself to his kind. Never has any writer so identified himself with nature and so constantly used it as the symbol of his interior life. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish Thoreau from his companions, the woods, the woodchucks and muskrats, the birds, the pond and the river. An inspired prescience foretold where to find the flower he wanted, and how to lure the little Musketaquid perch to his hand. Rare plants bloomed when he arrived at their secret hiding-places as if they had made an appointment with him; and the birds knew their lover's old cap and never mistook his telescope for a gun. In his intercourse with nature his pilot was some prophetic thought which led him by sure instinct to its sympathetic analogon in nature. It was natural, there-

fore, that to such a man systems of education should seem hindrances; they interposed another's will across the track of one's native intuitions. To shake off such substitutes with all their baggage was his prime intention.

Emerson, on the contrary, wished for every help and advantage offered by the world of men, books and institutions; he proposed indeed, that man should go alone, but not necessarily on all-fours or on the stilts of pedantry. He was to give himself all the available advantages in order to measure himself with them, and that he might not be dazzled or embarrassed by illusions concerning them. He began with nature and ended with it; between there should lay a long succession of studies and adventures which were to be included in his idea of culture.

In his conversation with me, however, he spoke more of men and books than of nature. He commended Adam Smith's "Moral Sentiments"; also, J. St. John's volume on "Greek Manners and Customs." Doubtless he conformed himself to his visitor and became a bit of a pedagogue. Then he talked of Chaucer with great enthusiasm, and recited some lines in a tone and modulation which rendered their music perfectly.

"For him was lever have at his beddes heed
Twenty bokes, clad in blak or reed,
Of Aristotle and his philosophye,
Than robes riche, —
. . . . . .
And bisily gan for the soules pray
Of hem that yaf him wher-with to scoleye."

What a fine, obsolete word is "scoleye"; and how much we need to get it back as an antidote to the vocabulary of college sports.

Emerson spoke of Plato also, saying that it was a great day in a man's life when he first read "The Banquet." I was glad to hear him say that, because I knew there were such days, having had just one in my short life, and eagerly I heard there was a possibility of more. He brought forth some souvenirs of men and literature; among them a daguerreotype of Carlyle; he spoke of his physiognomy, his heavy eyebrows and projecting base of the forehead, underset by the heavy lower jaw and lip, between which as between millstones, he said, every humbug was sure to be pulverized. The brow pierced it, the jowl crunched it. Emerson said, Channing called his under lip whapper-jawed. I asked him something about Carlyle's manner of speech, remembering to have read somewhere of a peculiar refrain in his conver-

sation. Then he good-naturedly imitated it for me. Emerson was an excellent mimic when he chose to be. He said the conspicuous point in Carlyle's style was his strength of statement. I think at this date those critics who can never see but one object at a time, and whose chief insight is a comparison of one creative gift with another, were still insisting that Emerson was only the adulterated echo of Carlyle. In 1848 they received a broadside from Mr. J. R. Lowell's "Fable for Critics," where he drew up in rather pedantic, antithetical form the resemblances and contrasts between Carlyle and Emerson. Mr. Lowell went on, however, to commit the same mistake in regard to supposed imitators of Emerson that already had been made in regard to Carlyle's.

Among his literary treasures Emerson

showed me a folio copy of Montaigne which had once belonged to the library of Joseph Bonaparte. It had a fine engraving of Montaigne; under it the scales and the motto, "*Que scais-je?*" — What do I know? This I took to be the volume before Emerson when he wrote, "As I look at his effigy opposite the title-page, I seem to hear him say, You may play old Poz, if you will; you may rail and exaggerate, — I stand here for truth, and will not, for all the states, and churches, and revenues, and personal reputations of Europe, overstate the dry fact, as I see it; I will rather mumble and prose about what I certainly know, — my house and barn; my father, my wife and tenants; my old, lean, bald pate; my knives and forks; what meats I eat; and what drinks I prefer; and a hundred straws just as ridic-

ulous, — than I will write, with a fine crow-quill, a fine romance."

Last he called me to look at the single painting on the walls of his study, a copy of Angelo's Fates. We looked at it in silence. What had youth to do with those remorseless sisters? Youth would rather have chosen to ornament his chamber-study (rent one dollar per term) with pictures of Aphrodite and the Muses. As a matter of fact the poor student's walls had not even paper-hangings — only endless tapestries of the unattainable. I amused myself in looking over the bookcases; and Emerson took down a volume which he requested me to read and keep for a year. It was George Herbert's poems. When I returned the book, mentioning my profitable hours with it, Emerson wrote me a welcome letter in which he said,

alluding to Herbert, "I am glad you like these old books; or rather glad that you have

"Eyes that the beam celestial view
Which evermore makes all things new."

He went on to say, "There is a super-Cadmean alphabet, which when one has once learned the character, he will find, as it were, secretly inscribed, look where he will, not only in books and temples but in all waste places and in the dust of the earth. Happy he who can read it, for he will never be lonely or thoughtless again. And yet there is a solid pleasure to find those who know and like the same thing, the authors, who have recorded their interpretation of the legend, and better far the living friends who read as we do and compare notes with us."

George Herbert recalls to me Emer-

son's remark in regard to the proper part of the day for study, — that we must be Stoics in the morning; that it would do to relax a little in the evening; and his quoting in illustration a somewhat Orphic proverb from George Herbert's "Jacula Prudentum," "In the morning, mountains; in the evening, fountains."

Besides these fragments of the hours I spent with Emerson, I find in my memoranda that he held a light opinion of things this side the water; that we Americans are solemn on trifles and superficial in the weighty; that there is no American literature;[1] Griswold says there is, but it is his merchandise — he keeps its shop. Had Emerson forgotten the Rev. Cotton Mather's three hundred and eighty-two works? He said

[1] This was in 1852.

we needed some great poets, orators. He was always looking out for them, and was sure the new generation of young men would contain some. Thoreau here remarked he had found one, in the woods, but it had feathers and had not been to Harvard College. Still it had a voice and an aerial inclination, which was pretty much all that was needed. "Let us cage it," said Emerson. "That is just the way the world always spoils its poets," responded Thoreau. Then Thoreau, as usual, had the last word; there was a laugh, in which for the first time he joined heartily, as the perquisite of the victor. Then we went in to tea in right good humor. I fear that I was invited to tea because I did not know how to take myself out of the house. I remember not much of the evening's talk. Probably my meas-

ure was full; it was a peck, and here was a bushel. However, I have always felt that the silver cup somehow got into my tiny bag.

In subsequent pages I shall endeavor to summarize and convey what Emerson was to the young men of my time. By a natural affinity we who were his readers soon found each other. It was under cover of a partial, general agreement that we allowed ourselves to feel that he spoke for young men and women; that he was their champion, in the fresh, mysterious impulses of a new day; that he expressed what they were as yet only feeling, mingling poetry and philosophy in due proportions for their budding minds; and that in personal intercourse with them he acted the part of a lover, intimating that they were the wisdom and the inspiration of

all his thought; deferring to them as superior persons more newly arrived from the empyrean; while, in truth, they were indebted to him for a certain beautiful exaltation of purpose and conduct which fitted them to be his audience, and the object of his solicitude and admiration. Whoever plants seeds and afterward enjoys the flower and fruit does not much remember his toil, so great is his joy, but gives the whole credit to the soil, to the sun and to the shower.

That Emerson was conscious of his relation to the youth of his time is shown in a letter to Elizabeth Peabody in which he says, "My special parish is young men inquiring their way in life."

And to Carlyle he writes to the same effect: "As usual at this season of the year, I, incorrigible spouting Yankee, am writing an oration to deliver to the

boys in one of the little country colleges nine days hence. (This was The Method of Nature, before the Society of the Adelphi, Waterville College, Maine, 1841.) You will say I do not deserve the help of any Muse. Oh, if you knew how natural it is to me to run to these places! Besides, I am always lured by the hope of saying something which shall stick by the good boys."

Emerson's attitude of expectancy and generous recognition of the possibilities of youth were in part the source of his intellectual power. Not a descent through seven generations of clergymen gave it to him, but an ascent through the long and broken lines of loftiest genius of all ages.

"Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend:

And being frank, she lends to those are free."

Since the days of Socrates no young men have been more fortunate than those who came into the circle of his acquaintance and influence. There were others, older and more conservative, who wished to gather some marketable fruit from this elm. There were those who wished to subsidize him to some school, party, or sect. I think that Emerson knew his interlocutor, his man, very well. He had not packed your trunk, but he divined its contents. He did not resist too much; he did not waste his force in vain disputation, but obeyed the Greek verse:

"When to be wise is all in vain, be not wise at all."

And it has been related that he went to bed to escape argument. He punished

the Western men who pressed him too hard with question and objection, by reporting that the St. Louis logicians rolled him in the mud!

He knew his man well. His kindness and tact were never at fault. Some one has related that calling on him, he fumbled about his room for — a ripe pear! Yes, he understood when to proffer pears and when ideas. The Pythian oracle was ambiguous when the suppliant came upon a trivial errand. When men came only to have their fortunes told, or to know how their peddling would prosper, the response became confused and diminished. It did not know what to say. Then men accused it of obscurity and prevarication. They silenced what should have silenced them. It is easy to be inspired at a noble demand. As long as there are sin-

cere, earnest seekers, so long will the oracles continue and continue divine. Emerson refused to dogmatize about what is necessarily obscure at present. So some thought the obscurity lay in him. To all that man has achieved, and to all man's hopes, he was vividly responsive, and maintained no doubtful position. In poetry and nature, wherein he was greatest, it is to be considered that the most perfect imaginative expression is so identified with objects themselves as to share in their mystery, and to be capable of their own manifold interpretation. He discovered a new method of thinking about man and nature; he endeavored to report what they said to him in their inmost being. Others have used them as symbols of life; he tried to penetrate the symbol itself. This gave an elevation to his style, so that error was glad to be vanquished by

so serene a voice, and to fall down without noise or commotion.

"A gentle death did Falsehood die,
Shot thro' and thro' with cunning words."

Emerson was nearing his forty-ninth birthday when I first met him, — an age when a man is no longer young, yet bears no marked sign of years. He looked well and vigorous. His complexion was clear and wholesome. Long walks on country roads and through his favorite pine-woods, a simple diet, and more than all a placid, hopeful temperament, rendered him sound in body and intellect. I think he did not walk so much for mere exercise as for pleasure and meditation. His books take one into the open air more than into the study; the sky is lofty over them, the path strewn with symbols. He knows where he treads, and he observes as he saunters

along. He had good legs and feet for walking and not too much body for them to carry. He was tall and spare; his head was high and narrow over the ears, the occiput well built up, which made his features seem large and prominent. I doubt if a phrenologist would have found by any outward sign the genius hidden in that head. The Delphic oracle might,—after reading his books. He was a simple, plainly dressed country gentleman in general appearance; unpretentious, unaggressive, readily allowing to every one his own place and functions. No romances, no mysteries attach themselves to his personality or to his memory. When he journeyed up the Nile in his last years, it was reported that the Sphinx called to him out of her sands, "You are another!" The wit and the voice were

ventriloquized from Concord, but fairly represented the common opinion about Emerson.

I have heard one pretty incident of his early manhood, not romantic enough for the modern Romeo, but sufficient for the time and for Emerson. He was preaching in Concord, N. H., for a few Sundays, and became engaged to a beautiful young woman of that town. Returning to his boarding-place after an evening with her, he opened the door of the parlor where the boarders were usually gathered, and, pausing on the threshold, said, "My friends, I am engaged." Whereupon some pious member of the company exclaimed, "Praise God! Let us sing, 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.'" So said, so sang, and all joined in the hymn.

How simple and charming the man-

ners of those days unvexed by any knowledge of the Sphinx or Brahma.

Emerson had an alert look in conversation, and on the lecture platform a sidelong, bird-like poise of the head, as if looking into the distance, and listening. His shoulders were not strongly built, and he leaned forward a little in walking. He was slow of speech, reflective, and always waiting for right words; for he hated repetition and circuitous expression forever returning upon itself. He once reminded a Harvard student, who read a composition to him, fashioned in the usual periodic style, of the Spartans' reproof of a too eloquent and prolix ambassador, that they had forgotten the first half of his speech and could make nothing of the remainder. Whereupon the orator cut it down to four words; but the Spartan fathers said

two would have sufficed. Yet Emerson delighted in a copious and graphic vocabulary. He thought words sometimes so beautiful that they had the force of an action; but they must be the ornament of thought, — the thought must create them; and he has himself revealed the secret of style, — "the best thoughts run into the best words." In a lecture he would often linger over a page, turning it back and forth, seeming to lose his place; suddenly at the strong points he would come down with tremendous emphasis, clenched hand, and a voice that thrilled his hearers to their innermost being. Then a calm succeeded, and the relief of a rustle in the seats, — the subdued form of applause among transcendental audiences, — when, recovering themselves, they awaited the next brilliant outburst. His voice was

unmatchable by any I ever heard; it had the potency and effect of eloquence, with not a single one of the traditional characteristics. And his matter was just as far from the usual subjects of the platform.

Emerson is invariably described as a cheerful and optimistic man. Do you think he had never suffered from those blows of fortune that attend mankind, and from which it rarely escapes? It could not be; but he buried his sorrows a little deeper than other men, and uncovered no wounds for the sake of a cheap sympathy. His habitual smile disarmed inquiries as to health, his fortune and his sorrows. That serene smile guarded an inner chamber more securely than an army. If he had known poverty, this poor orphan who drove his mother's cow to pasture beyond Boston

Common; if he had struggled with ill health; if he had suffered the sharpest anguish of the heart,—the loss of his youthful bride and then of a beloved child (the "hyacinthine boy"); if he had endured for many years the derision and all but persecution of the so-called scholars, theologians, and critics of the country, he made no sign of anger or perturbation. He buried all such accidents under a magnanimous composure, as under a mantle of deep, soft snow.

Such was the man as he appeared in private and public. There are many photographs of him at different periods of his life, several oil and crayon portraits, and several marble and plaster busts. His son, E. W. Emerson, thinks the bust by the sculptor Morse is the most faithful in portraying certain inward traits of his being, his serenity and

hopefulness. As far as I know, there is no public monument to Emerson. Harvard University, after rejecting him for the better part of his life, is about to name a building in his honor. Our country as yet does not honor poets and philosophers with public monuments. Our heroes stand in bronze and marble, costumed in frock or tail coats and high collars, or sit on horses whose fore feet paw the upper air, in danger every moment of disappearing into space; horse and rider, — some have already disappeared. Emerson builded his own monument, and it is not confined on any pedestal, for "the whole earth is the monument of illustrious men."

Not long after the time of which I have been writing, Concord became a university to many young men. There we sat at the feet of three or four

masters, Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau. It made the little scholarship of Cambridge insignificant. There we learned how to live; what ideals to make our own; what books to read; how to find in nature its poetry, its identities and symbols, and in man his divine part. Optimism and a cheerful spirit were rife in the Concord air. Wonderful prophetic anticipations of the future filled our youthful hearts.

"Beside us what glad comrades smiled and strove;
Beyond us what dim visions rose to view."

Nothing could be in greater contrast than this stimulating atmosphere compared with that of Cambridge, where every generous aspiration was stifled by intolerance. There was a smart saying current in Cambridge about us, that we entered mystics and graduated dyspep-

tics, and I think there was a middle term still more sharp,—skeptics. Mystics, skeptics and dyspeptics had the right ring to please the mockers. Dyspepsia was no doubt the prevailing malady, but more honorable than the scars of the athletic field, being in large measure the result of a Spartan diet, hard study and a slender purse, the savings of a believing mother or toiling, unselfish sister. One of our hungry, pale-faced companions, anticipating the remedies and power of mind-cure, advised not to let your stomach know that you knew it had dyspepsia.

Concord was the exchange for all the best things then being written or said, on which you might hear Thoreau's laconic summation, Alcott's genial comment, or rendering into the Orphic philosophy, or Emerson's wise and conciliа-

tory interpretations. I wonder whether this generation of young men envy the opportunities of such an Academe. We did not go in crowds, nor often. It was not a day-school, nor were the lessons set and the professors prepared, and nobody was ever graduated. The Concord term might last as long as you lived, and perhaps longer. Once or twice during a college term, and after graduation, an occasional pilgrimage was enough to replenish our enthusiasm.

I salute you, my brothers, whose youthful faith in Emerson has not wavered nor waned. Behold at length its consummation and approval in the general applause of the world.

EMERSON'S INFLUENCE ON THE YOUNG MEN OF HIS TIME

EMERSON'S INFLUENCE ON THE YOUNG MEN OF HIS TIME

THE men whose youth fell in the decade preceding the civil war and who read books, especially poetry, were deeply moved on first reading Emerson. The feeling we then had and the manner in which we variously expressed it would even now, in the completion of his life and fame, seem exaggerated to the world as indeed it does to ourselves. Youth is the happy time when comparisons are not made, when we admire without criticism, when the sense of proportion is dormant and we are wholly

possessed by the spirit of imitation. There were very few of us who did not catch the style of his sentences, and his ideas immediately became our own. They were reproduced on a hundred occasions and we experienced a deep, heartfelt pride in our superiority. Some endeavored to form their lives upon his ideals, not unsuccessfully; others to dip their pens in his inkstand with the usual catastrophe. The ease with which his name lent itself to an adjective,—Emersonian,—was a great comfort and convenience to our critics; to define the term was more than they or we could do. When hurled at us we realized it meant something opprobrious; but when reading Emerson's books there was an exalted mood, a mental quickening, for which no epithet was good enough. Thus our

defensive position was difficult to hold though we justified ourselves in it, and we became more or less concealed and silent except with sympathizers. I was looked upon with suspicion by my friends when it became known that I was a reader of Emerson. I knew they were ignorant of the contents of his books; yet I felt conscious of something not quite respectable and permitted. One learns later that innocent and sensitive persons can easily be made to feel guilty; and in New England at least we had been made to believe so long that nearly everything which was agreeable was sinful that it had grown into a morbid sensibility to opinion.

It was for many such prisoners that Emerson found a release. He freed us from the control of some ancient theological tenets and led us to the simpler

and still more ancient moral elements of the universe. I think one of Emerson's chief services to his countrymen is and will continue to be in disentangling the connection between forms of religion and ethics; in once more planting prostrate man upon his feet and then uplifting his eyes to the spiritual beauties and dignities of life. No matter what his topic, he everywhere reaches that conclusion. There is this thread throughout his most illogical pages; this central thought unifies his unarticulated sentences. In general it may be answered to literary objections, that when Emerson is not a poet he is a prophet, and as such is amenable only to the canons which govern deliverances of that kind. It is perhaps too early to pronounce upon Emerson's place in letters. It is uncertain whether

he belongs on the shelf with poets, prophets or moralists. When I read his poems he seems wholly poet; and when I read "Nature" and the earlier essays he also seems a poet, escaped temporarily into prose. In these latter he keeps near unto the hedge of his "pleachéd garden" across which he constantly coquets with the Muse.

As to his style no one has yet determined its value and durable quality. A genuine style never wearies; time, therefore, and many generations of readers must settle this question. Tastes change as much and as often in literature as in other things and with surprising rapidity in our time; yet there is something, we will not even call it taste, which does not change. It is that which is deeper, more permanent than taste, seated at the center of man's

being in all ages. There is much in Emerson's mode of expression which of itself challenges attention. It has immense elevation; it goes like a bird from one tree-top to another; or as the gods talk around the Olympian peaks. It is almost too lofty; one gasps for a less rarified air and longs to touch the ground. With Emerson one never sees anything less than a vision, hears no voice but that of the soul; yes, and beyond that the Over Soul. All is in the distance, a vast perspective lined with majestic figures of men and women as they would be if they but knew their own worth; and at the end a lofty temple consecrated to the moral sentiments.

In reading "English Traits" I cannot divest myself of the feeling that I am reading of a people much further re-

moved than England and in no way related to our time and country; they seem as distant and in truth as dead as Greeks or Romans, with such a cool, remote and contemplative pencil does he paint them. Is it his imagination that produces this effect, or is it that he sees things never before disclosed, and hence the illusion of distance and unfamiliarity? The essential, national qualities are there, but abstracted in such a manner that they stand out like a scientific diagnosis; the diagnosis is so interesting and acute that the poor patient is forgotten.

All of us in the days of our youth saw everything, — as soon as Mr. Emerson had seen it for us. Our experience was precisely similar to his own with Montaigne. He says in one of the few revelations of his own intellectual his-

tory, that when he first read Montaigne he felt as if he had himself written the book. So we felt when we read Emerson, and we had in him a precedent which we much relied upon and often quoted. Long afterward I heard a religious enthusiast say that if some one had not written the New Testament he should, and I understood him through a similar feeling regarding other books. Often as this happens to the sympathetic reader in later life, nothing can outwear the memory of the first youthful experience of it, and very dear to the heart is the volume, and venerated the writer at whose fires we have lighted our own little torch. There was in all this seeming comprehension the usual amount of self-deception and illusion. Emerson shot many an arrow beyond our ken; some of

which perhaps it may require several ages to overtake; but we beheld the superb flight and thought we could see the mark, for youth is both confident and credulous. This faith kept and still keeps some of us steady in our allegiance to the Emersonian insights. Having found an interpretation for some of our aspirations, we expected to arrive at all in due time. We believed in Emerson's discoveries; if you will, in his obscurities, and in whatever we could put into his writing out of our own thought. This belongs to the writer who has stirred us as much as what he has actually written belongs to him. It is his by virtue of that first germ which originates others and still others in a countless series. A good book is a book plus a good reader. Find what you may and own your debt,

pay it and say as Emerson said to his children when they asked him if he believed that Shakespeare meant what they found to praise in a certain sentence: "I think an author (or artist) has a right to anything good that another can find in his work." All the interpretations and implications are his as much as the limbs are the tree's and the twigs, leaves, blossoms and fruits are the limb's.

We thought with Gautier that "Genius is always right; whatever it invents exists." We listened to whatever Emerson said with a certain haunting expectation seldom disappointed; and it must be confessed for a time we narrowed our world by having no ear for any one else; so that we appreciated keenly the witticism of a gentleman who, arriving just too late

to hear Emerson's famous Phi Beta Kappa oration at Cambridge, in 1837, remarked that it was better to miss Emerson than to hear anybody else.

Emerson has been a liberal education and emancipation to a large number of men and women for nearly two generations. One can only conjecture whether young men and women are reading him to-day with the enthusiasm of those who read forty years ago and under a certain ban which made it the more intoxicating. For some time past Emerson has been in fashion. It is doubtful whether an author who is in vogue has after all so deep an influence as one who has gained the concentrated and almost passionate devotion of a few readers. Ah, the critics will say, this is the conceit of the obscure and unrecognized. But, I reply for their comfort and enlightenment that this very

narrow and ardent following is the cause of the enlargement of the writer's circle and is the way of a slow yet triumphant progress to an immortality of fame. It is certainly true that Emerson was once considered dangerous reading; that we who followed him suffered contempt from some, reproach and suspicion from nearly all, and that we are now justified and compensated. It was a situation for which the liberality of modern opinion can furnish no parallel, there being but one reason at present for consigning a writer to the Index Expurgatorius, namely, the taint of flagrant immorality. Old beliefs have been so rent by a succession of iconoclasts, have been so assaulted by the progress of scientific discoveries that they have lost their dogmatic assertiveness and are no longer intolerant of innovations in thought and custom.

Emerson's Influence on Young Men

I have said that readers of poetry were especially prepared for welcoming Emerson's writings, the earliest of which were in prose. Poetry emancipates young men from their inward and outward limitations; it opens to them an ideal world and attaches them to truth and beauty. More than this, it quickens the latent intellectual life by putting into choice phrase and melodious sound much which they imagine themselves to have felt, thought and already lived through. It certifies and establishes a relation between their own incipient consciousness and that of the matured mind, and lays the foundations of culture. Emerson's prose is much like poetry; it wants but the wide margins and capital letters. It has all the surprises of good verse; it is rhythmical, episodical, sometimes austere, again homely or

graceful and nearly always suggestive. He is thinking over what you have thought; such is his insinuating, flattering address. He seems to whisper, "I am merely the organ; the idea is yours." The temptation then was great among young men to try to find expression for themselves; it turned out to be merely repetition for the time; not only the thought but the language was unapproachable. The hall-mark could not be erased and another substituted. However, Mr. Lowell sufficiently satirized the imitators of Emerson. It is curious to remember now that Emerson himself was arraigned for an imitative style and even for borrowing his ideas. But who has not been? Plato was; and those who have not been are not remembered. "The greatest genius is the most indebted man."

An aptitude for assimilation is one form of genius, often mistaken for imitation and plagiarism by those who forget that there is and can be no more material than there ever was and that art alone endures:

> "The bust outlasts the throne,
> The coin Tiberius."

Emerson's poetry was more difficult to imitate than his prose; yet they are so essentially alike in tone and thought that whoever admires one will be apt to appreciate the other. It is safe to say that nearly all the young men who took Emerson for a master, either wrote or soon began to write poetry. Here a man finds his true level; he may be equal to intelligent reading and complete appreciation of poetry, but when he attempts to produce it he may find himself truly empty. He discovers that

his effort no more resembles the self which seemed to be actively present when he was reading the work of the creative imagination than letters formed with his left hand resemble his most careless right-handed autograph. This also was a discipline for which we were much indebted to Emerson. Many paths must be tried and many must be abandoned ere one finds himself. Some of the Emersonian disciples have struggled on with the muse and have added to the music of the world; most became silent when they entered into active life.

His verse rarely touches the common elements of the poetic domain; it has little warmth, no sensuousness, no passion; but it does have wisdom, reflection, beautiful perceptions, clear, chaste and often perfect expression, stanzas and lines that cling in the memory with the

sweetest and best. When I say little warmth I mean in comparison with the more popular orders of poetry which celebrate the domestic affections, sufferings and joys, the nursery, the grave, the raptures of lovers with the attendant tragedy and comedy of passion. But I am reminded by a friend, and a more competent judge than myself, that Emerson's poems have "sun-heat." That description pleases me more than my own, and every reader will be able to compute for himself the distinctions between "sun-heat" and its innumerable substitutes. His poems repeat a great deal that is in the "Essays" in another form. Emerson's taste for the poetry of other poets was just a trifle peculiar; he loved what we all love and a little beside. I believe he was fond of some books of poetry for other things

than their poetry. One good word sometimes was sufficient to attract him. He gave a generous welcome to everything which called itself verse. This indeed was his noblest intellectual trait, his magnanimous recognition of the work of others and his open, liberal praise and faith in it. And I think no one ever came into personal contact with him without a renewed confidence in his own possibilities.

In his selection of poetry entitled "Parnassus" there seems on a cursory glance nothing very distinctive; but reading more carefully one finds here and there the strangest and most unexpected evidences of his poetical proclivities. I recall an epigram on this feature of the collection:

> Some bards are here and some are not,
> Either unknown or else forgot;

And some are here elsewhere unknown
Save to themselves and Emerson.
But with the immortals do not class us
For an idle hour on Mount Parnassus.

The books a man likes are of a piece with his general sympathies. Emerson was a wide, miscellaneous reader and had an eagle eye for what pleased him and made it his own. His quotations are as striking as the text. When was a line of poetry hitherto almost unknown more aptly chosen and set in such royal position as that one which closes the Essay on Montaigne?

"If my bark sink 'tis to another sea."

It has been quoted a hundred times since, not once before; I have seen it used even as a prose sentence. His quotations incited one to good reading, since they were gathered from the best books of all ages and countries. Com-

ing to them you found that Emerson had often appropriated the only gem. Since both he and Thoreau found close at hand much that was admirable, the great in the little, the universe in the Concord microcosm, it became the fashion among the Transcendentalists to hunt for the obscure and unrecognized, and to proclaim a discovery. I know not how many great but unknown geniuses arrived and departed each year at Concord. Young men came from all parts of the world, and those who could not come — wrote! We who were nearer made frequent pilgrimages alone or in companies. He received us each and all with his unfailing suavity and deference. His manner toward young men was wonderfully flattering; it was a manner I know no word for but expectancy; as if the world-problem was

now finally to be solved and we were the beardless Œdipuses for whom he had been faithfully waiting. Bursting with things we had locked up in our bosoms and which we thought it would be so easy to say, silence and vacuity benumbed us on arriving in the presence of the poet and prophet. His magnanimous spirit soothed and reassured us; and to the little we brought he added a full store, inserting, as I have said, a silver cup in our coarse sacks of common grain, so that we returned to our brethren with gladness and praise. Yet what disappointments he must have suffered. What trials of patience and hospitality. What self-restraints in the visits of friendly though fatal "devastators of the day." [1]

[1] He once protested against an introduction saying, "Whom God hath put asunder let no man join together."

"To try our valor fortune sends a foe;
To try our equanimity a friend."

He bore all with a gentle serenity and doubtless extracted from fools and bores some wise or witty thought. The nearest he ever came to dismissing a visitor was when a strenuous Millerite called and attempted to win Emerson to his belief. Urging that the world was surely about to come to an end Emerson replied, "Well, let it go; we can get on just as well without it."

Yes, he could do very well without it and must often have done so. Occasionally he paid the world a friendly visit; for the most part like all great spirits he seems to have been a lonely man. At death he entered upon no uncertain experience. To our question, what shall we do without him? let

himself answer: "Great men exist that there may be greater men."

I have always wished to explain the influence of Emerson on the young men of my time; and, since his active life covered the period which was, without dispute, an intellectual, political and religious crisis, I may be permitted to include in it some account of the attitude and experiences of my youthful contemporaries, too immature for actual participation in affairs or the expression of themselves in writing. They were in the plastic stage, tormented by spirits of discontent and fascinated by visions of high ideals of life. They were like a flock of birds which a gun has startled from an old haunt and who hover uncertain, perplexed where next to alight. I was myself one of such a flock and I remember well the gun and

the flash which frightened us and scattered us, some to Emerson, some to Theodore Parker, others to Garrison and Fourier; while many, perhaps most, returned in a little while to their former associations; yet never to be quite what they were before. A few reacted so violently as to entrench themselves only more firmly in the absolutism and finality of the existing institutions — the Bible as interpreted by the doctors of theology; the Constitution as expounded by Webster and Taney and Calhoun, and they reasserted the claims of the literature of the last two centuries.

The clocks of the churches had run down. They no longer struck the present hour; the hands were fixed as motionless as those on the dummy clocks of the watchmakers. We wended our way to the Sunday service full of doubts and

returned more and more confirmed in them. The devil and hell and the Jews were constant parables of our own sinful natures; and out of an indiscriminate indictment but one single path was shown from the fall of man to his salvation. Ever the path of salvation for man is narrow, and it is a lone and solitary one. There is no crowd there, driven by fears or promises and marshalled by banners with a single inscription,—"this world or the other." I remember the weight of human depravity was summed up in that vague term so constantly on the lips of preachers, "the world." Listening to them I associated it with something monstrous, forbidden and as fearful as the darkness and hobgoblins are to childhood. As the concrete is ever the characteristic of childish imagination, I at first supposed

it was some place beyond the Mendon Hills, which then bounded my horizon. Had the preacher been there? How did he dare? Had it any real existence, this "world" of the pulpit? It was painted in deepest colors and so overdrawn that like Milton's Satan I felt more interest in it than in the saints and their heaven. I had a great curiosity, inspired by the emphasis on the word and the all too attractive description, to see it for myself.

As a seeker after this glittering, seductive iniquity for many years I have never been able to find it in that absolute and pure estate postulated. Such of its forbidden fruit as I have plucked I have found tolerably sweet and wholesome and but little more than a convenient figure of speech for the exhorter.

Emerson had walked out of church

with the utmost gentleness and deference and established his tabernacle by the Concord wayside. There without noise or violence he continued to preach the word which liberated me and my contemporaries from our spiritual bondage and resolved our negations into affirmations. For the faith that was in us we employed no logic; we made when necessary a new affirmation. Thus without revolution or turmoil a force came into the world which ere it was aware had undermined the ancient New England error. There was a little controversy, and those who kept the shew-bread of Unitarianism at Cambridge were at first startled into an exclamation which sounded like "atheism"; but it subsided slowly and it is now a long time silent. Atheism was the first alarm sounded and as usual

came from the seats of learning,—those seats where men sit too long and softly. This fearful word was next softened into pantheism, then to German mysticism, Neo-Platonism; and many other epithets were experimented with by clerical and literary reviewers, until it was finally mellowed into Transcendentalism, where their bewildered pens found rest. The Unitarian clergy were and have always been a company of cultivated men, rather independent thinkers, and already without the pale of canonical churches, it was easy for them to take a forward step. One by one they and their followers accepted Emerson as the prophet of a new spirit in religion; prophet also of a new insight into nature, into history, into conduct, and the poet of the ideal in all human relations and activities. Whether the Emersonian insights

and ideals were altogether new and original is immaterial. From everlasting to everlasting, truth and beauty exist the same. They do become dull and trite by reiteration in a traditional language and require from time to time a fresh statement. This Emerson gave us in a rich and striking form, unencumbered by prolixity, logic or authorities. / He took the shorter way to men's minds,— the road of the self-illuminated spirit speaking to the highest in other selves.

Many voices in time echoed his messages and continue in these days their response from the pulpit and the press. I meet his sentences or verses as the mottoes of books, on calendars and Farmers' Almanacs, in private marginal annotations, and especially in all the strange assortment of publications of the seekers after new light in psychology,

metaphysics, science and socialism. On a sentence from Emerson's writings they issue uniformed and provisioned to found a new sect or school. It must be admitted that Emerson's sentences separated from their fellows readily lend themselves to every sort of propaganda. It is the fate of all inspired utterance founded on what is deepest and most universal in experience. But the critique and corrective are in other sentences; for Emerson never allows a too literal application of his oracular utterances. Although he has wings with which to soar, he loves also to plant his feet firmly upon the earth. I dare say it would have alarmed him had any body of men attempted to organize into civil or religious compact his more advanced ideas. He wished rather to see the whole of mankind moved forward

and upward to higher ideals through the integrity of the individual and not drawn apart into coteries of one idea. He did not like the responsibilities of a founder of beliefs. He would have been the first to escape from his own fold, so jealous was he of his freedom of thought, the possibilities of the morrow and the dangers of consistent conservatism when one has joined or formed a party or creed. Growth ends with the birth of creeds. Advance is then too often accounted heresy. In his lifetime, pilgrims from all quarters of the earth sought him out, having read in his books something of which they claimed themselves to be the discoverers or apostles. For this they laid hands upon him, demanding sympathy and,— a subscription. I believe they usually got both, but no more. He remained Emer-

son, not a Come-outer, Swedenborgian, or Fourierite. We who were young and without crotchets or affiliations went to him in quite another way and with quite other purposes; and I am happy in knowing that he liked us better than any other class of visitors, even those who were themselves famous.[1]

It is true that many young men of my time had broken with the churches of their fathers and mothers. They had undergone the Sunday-schools, family prayers and revivals, yet obstinately remained unconverted. They were more or less consciously seeking some other way, very ignorantly, blindly and

[1] I think you say rightly that he liked the young pilgrims better, though youth includes many persons over three score and ten. But of the young he liked the young in years best if they had bloom, the ideal and courage. — *Note by Edward Waldo Emerson.*

helplessly. They were by no means iconoclasts or heretics; yet they were called bad names. It hurt a little; in some cases it darkened the road to success and prosperity. Quiet and independent paths are always open to him who prefers them, or whom chance has forbidden the thronged thoroughfare. Nature which we had always loved and lived with now became doubly dear by Emerson's celebration of its meanings and symbols. We were more than ever convinced that the higher life could best be cultivated in the country, in retirement, and in humble occupations where it was not absolutely necessary to cheat and be cheated. Thus were scattered over the rural parts of New England, and no doubt in other portions of the land, a few men and many women who were and continue to be examples of

plain living and high thinking, the impulse toward which came originally through the teaching of Emerson. Such models of domestic simplicity united with noble interests and purposes I have met in the homes of some friends, where to abide a guest was to be in a temple consecrated to the Muses and the Graces. In this retirement some attempted to cultivate literature, and I venture the assertion that more of it has sprung from the impulse of that early awakening than from any other source.

Here are some sentences from one of Emerson's earlier addresses, "Man the Reformer," delivered in 1841, which illustrate his views and had great influence in turning the thoughts of his hearers and readers toward a reform in ways of living.

"Our life as we lead it is common

and mean; some of those offices and functions for which we were mainly created are grown so rare in society that the memory of them is only kept alive in old books and in dim traditions.

"I will not dissemble my hope that each person whom I address has felt his own call to cast aside all evil customs, timidities and limitations and to be in his place a free and helpful man.

"The manual labor of society ought to be shared among all the members. A man should have a farm or a mechanical craft for his culture. We must have a basis for our higher accomplishments, our delicate entertainments of poetry and philosophy in the work of our hands. Manual labor is the study of the external world. The advantage of riches remains with him

who procured them, not with the heir. When I go into my garden with a spade and dig a bed I feel such an exhilaration and health that I discover that I have been defrauding myself all this time in letting others do for me what I should have done with my own hands.

"I do not wish to overstate this doctrine of labor or insist that every man should be a farmer any more than that every man should be a lexicographer. But the doctrine of the farm is merely this, that every man ought to stand in primary relations with the work of the world, ought to do it himself and not to suffer the accidents of his having a purse in his pocket or his having been bred to some dishonorable and injurious craft to sever him from those duties; and for this reason that labor is God's education.

"I think if a man find in himself any strong bias to poetry, to art, to the contemplative life, drawing him to these things with a devotion incompatible with good husbandry that man ought to reckon early with himself and respecting the compensations of the universe ought to ransom himself from the duties of economy by a certain rigor and privation in his habits. For privileges so rare and grand let him not stint to pay a great tax. Let him be a cenobite, a pauper, and if need be celibate also. Let him learn to eat his meals standing, and to relish the taste for fair water and black bread. He must live in a chamber and postpone his self-indulgence, forewarned and forearmed against that frequent misfortune of men of genius, the taste for luxury.

"Why needs any man be rich? Why must he have horses, fine garments, handsome apartments, access to public houses and places of amusement? Only for want of thought. Give his mind a new image and he flees into a solitary garden or garret to enjoy it, and is richer with that dream than the fee of a county could make him.

"Let us learn the meaning of economy. Economy is a high, humane office, a sacrament, when its aim is grand; when it is the prudence of simple tastes, when it is practiced for freedom, or love, or devotion. Much of the economy which we see in houses is of base origin and is best kept out of sight. Parched corn eaten to-day that I may have roast fowl to my dinner on Sunday is a baseness; but parched corn

and a house with one apartment that I may be free of all perturbations, that I may be serene and docile to what the mind shall speak and girt and road-ready for the lowest mission of knowledge, is frugality for gods and heroes."

Emerson may have had a too masterful influence at first over these awakened souls, but through it they finally found their own genius and entering various paths with pen, with ledger, with sermon, in journalism, in teaching, in politics and law have everywhere uplifted our civilization and given a higher tone to public opinion. There are idealists in the stock exchange and on lonely New England farms whose pedigree can be traced to Concord.

Wisdom, it is said, is good with an inheritance, and some men begin with

the latter for their first enterprise. How to interpose in everyday affairs the due admixture of philosophy, some ambrosial salad with common bread and meat, is the problem of life. He who keeps in mind the precepts, and I may add, the practice of Emerson, has some helps to that end. It is well to have been shown that while involved in the petty as in the most imperial employments of this life the soul can dwell apart. He is fortunate who can do this; who does not need to separate himself from the world to be no part of its trivialities and its boasted realities.

Here I must record a sorrowful fact, — the dilemma in which I and many of my companions who wished to follow the Emersonian ideas found ourselves when it was necessary to choose

some definite career in life. It was not the Choice of Hercules, the absolute good or evil, but one of subtle and over-refined discriminations. We had learned only half of our lesson and bewildered by the current rejection of Emerson as a guide and obstructed on every hand by the stiff conservatism of the times in religion, literature and politics there seemed to be no place for us. The half-digested lesson therefore impelled us to the thought of separation and retirement. It would be easy, we dreamed, to follow ideals in solitude or in a specially selected, congenial society. We could at least work with our hands, dividing the day between labor and thought, and show the world the uselessness of church and state and riches. From these Arcadias and Utopias we were speedily driven, and compelled by

the usual necessities of life, we drifted back into the common employments and conditions of our fellows and learned at length the other half of our wise lesson, namely, to live out the ideal amid our own affairs, however humble, and with the brethren of the common lot.

I for one have been well satisfied to live without the American ambitions, in small, rustic communities, laboring sometimes with my hands and again with my pen in friendly obscurity. The voices and intimations of nature are not absent from such retreats, where also the records of the great spirits of literature can be gathered upon a few shelves; nor are the affairs of the little community altogether without interest, which once a year are concentrated in that impressive public function, the

Town Meeting.[1] For this latter I have the greatest respect as the oldest and chiefest palladium of civilization founded on freedom. There and there alone the citizen is a recognizable unit; elsewhere, mostly a cipher. One of the best lessons I have learned from Emerson, and others before me have made the same confession, is to be faithful over a few things, beginning first with self. If more things do not follow it is no affair of ours. There is nothing so alluring to most men as power and responsibility, but the ways to them are devious and largely in the hands of fortune. The

[1] My Father delighted in town meetings; sat there humbly as an admiring learner, while the farmer, the shoemaker and the squire made all that he delighted to read of Demosthenes, of Cato, of Burke, as true in Concord as in ancient cities. Especially was he pleased if he could carry in an Englishman to see. — *Note by E. W. Emerson.*

slave is contented when unaware of his chains; the free man in knowing his limits. A small stage for small men; but life can be well lived even here, and for the greater —

> "I think not much of that or the less:
> I hear the roll of the ages."

It was the same with the state and its tendencies as with the church. The bonds of tradition and an ancient superstition held fast the various religious orders of men. Slavery had paralyzed the moral sense of the state. The mutterings of strife were in the air, confined as yet to a few angry remonstrants against the apparent apathy of the North. It was in the North dangerous to life and property to speak publicly against slavery; in the South there were the tar-pot, the rifle and the jail on suspicion of Abolitionism. But on this sub-

ject there is abundant history. I wish to confine myself to the attitude of the handful of young men who, through the influence of Emerson, had become emancipated from the conservatism, the Whiggery and the dogmas of the times, who with the impetuosity of youth rushed into the other extreme of fanaticism, declaring war on their own account some years before Fort Sumter was fired upon. At the Phillips Academy, Andover, in 1853–54, among two hundred students there were only three of known anti-slavery sentiments. There Prof. Moses Stuart had shown the Bible authority for slavery; and Daniel Webster was the god of student idolatry. We three however stood fast by our colors in many a passionate argument in dormitory and campus; and when Anthony Burns was about to be returned

to his chains from a Boston Court of Justice, we were on the point of marching our army of three to the rescue; but alas, we had not a single gun. We consoled ourselves with composing speeches to be delivered for the inspiration of the rescuing mob. One of these I well remember, stuffed with apostrophes to the goddess of liberty and recondite classical allusions. What a spectacle to gods and men that might have been if delivered as intended by the beardless stripling from the topmost step of the Boston Court House, adding that ridiculous element which sometimes makes tragedy more tragic. We were intensely serious and in earnest. However we remained in our chambers and I dare say found a new vigor and point in Cicero's Orations from the tremendous convulsion in our own bosoms. We

studied now with a sort of fury and went about with the lean and hungry look of Cassius. In a spirit of vengeance we felt called upon to put our pro-slavery classmates at the foot of the class if we could punish them in no other way; and we succeeded, a scholastic and pedantic justice, which helped to cool our blood, and it delights me to remember and record. We made it most uncomfortable for the little downy-bearded friends of the slaveholders at recitation, where we took especial pains to emphasize every liberal Ciceronian sentiment and at the commons-table with gibe and satire we gave them no peace. We had all the fine sentiments concerning freedom at our tongues' end, as well as all the pathetic stories of the cruelties of African slavery. It was the custom of one or other of the

commons club officers to preside at the table and either to say grace himself or to call upon some other member. It happened on a day that one of the proscribed three who was not religiously inclined, presided and asked the blessing. He began, "O Lord, thou knowest the contented slave is a degraded man,"— what farther he intended to say I know not; there was a clatter of knives and forks and his grace came to a sudden ending. Silence and gloom overspread us during the remainder of breakfast and everybody felt ugly and ready for a fight. Thereafter only church members, that is, those of the pro-slavery set, were allowed to say grace.

In a few years more our numbers had suddenly and immensely increased. To hold anti-slavery sentiments was no longer to be a marked man. Sumner

had been struck down in the United States Senate by Preston Brooks, of South Carolina. We felt it was not a blow aimed at one man by another, but by one-half the nation against the other half. The South hurled the bludgeon, the North received the blow. As early as 1844 Emerson had very clearly announced his views on slavery; but I doubt if from the first he had held any other. It was not in his nature to be other than a lover of human freedom.[1]

In 1856, after the attack upon Sumner, he delivered a short but impressive speech at an indignation meeting of his fellow citizens in Concord.

[1] One of the finest pieces of character in my Father's life seems to me his entering the lists with the black giant knight Webster, then the darling of the country, in the Free Soil campaign of 1856.— *Note by E. W. Emerson.*

Then followed the great reception and procession in Boston in honor of Sumner upon his recovery and return to his home. The procession was led by the venerable Josiah Quincy. My companions and I were not far behind on foot carrying good, heavy walking sticks, not unlike clubs, which we brandished about in defiance of an enemy as yet unchallenged. Our blood was up, our tongues wildly loosened, although there were none present to engage in discussion with us. They were converted or dumb. Even Andover, Cambridge and other seats of learning that had held the Biblical and Constitutional briefs for slavery drew back in fright and repentance.

In 1859, John Brown was hung. No man or party could have been said at that time to lead the opinion of the

North. It was all but unanimous. The trial of Captain Brown aroused more antagonism against the South than years of anti-slavery agitation had been able to produce. His speech on that occasion became a rallying cry, bringing into prominence once more the Scriptural teachings concerning self-sacrifice and the brotherhood of man; and again we beheld the penalty of such words expiated upon a Virginia scaffold. During this stormy time Emerson appeared on the side of humanity. He made two addresses on Captain Brown which are among his collected writings and they are the most impassioned words he ever delivered.

We younger men followed his lead with still greater ardor. We were for action. We wanted to rescue John

Brown and offered our services for that purpose to certain persons whom we privately heard were ready to lead us. The force was to consist of some three thousand picked men who were to rendezvous separately at Harper's Ferry. More prudent counsels prevailed and we were left to nurse our wrath as best we could. The time soon came when there was ample scope for that wrath in a practicable direction. The flower of New England youth went to the war and gave their lives for their faith. For four years they continued to fall on battlefield and in hospital. Those years lost their spring and their shadow still darkens and delays it. But war was better than peace at the price asked; as Emerson said at its outbreak, "Sometimes gunpowder smells good." If it left the plough in the furrow, it

also broke up yardsticks and consumed selfishness in a flash ; overthrew mouldy conventions and made heroes out of pale students and dapper clerks.

For all this Emerson's lectures, conversations and published writings had helped to blazon the way. Young men under his influence were prepared for any enterprise that would bring in a better day. They took sides with the ideal against the prevalent opinions, customs and manners and often at the sacrifice of worldly prosperity. They sometimes carried individualism to excess and became recluse or eccentric. Yet to sum up, there has been no one man in our land who has exerted so powerful an influence for spiritual, moral and intellectual advancement as Emerson.

As a whole his ideas fortunately

cannot be formulated into a philosophy or creed unless indeed his constant tropes be taken literally, and it is too late for that; we have just escaped the long reign of literalism and shall not soon put our necks under the yoke of Asiatic symbols. Yet Emerson's views, ideal and impossible as they may seem to be, will serve a man very well when any of the real issues of life are to be met. There was never any question where those ideals would take Emerson himself, nor on which side he would be found when the opposing forces of freedom and slavery, of progress and conservatism should meet in peace or war. Some internal magnet, not to be deflected by public opinion, majorities, or popularity, pointed to the star of his hopes and convictions. I am impressed with the fact that he never

made any mistakes throughout his career. He faced one way and continued to face that way. He never had to recant, to make a new start, to modify or apologize. Instead, he went forward with an even, undeviating step, applying his leading thought, namely, the importance of the individual, his identity with nature and nature with itself, and above all insisting on the moral point of view through every subject that he discussed from his first word to his last. He presents the unique example of a man who continuously surrendered himself to the higher intuitions which he himself termed the Over Soul, meaning much the same thing as when the herdsman Amos wrote "God declareth unto man what is his thought." Unlike other moralists, religious teachers and prophets, who sometimes lapsed into

complaints or denunciation of human frailties, Emerson steadfastly fixes his eyes upon the highest and recognizes only the divine in man. The result upon the reader is a wonderful exaltation and desire to realize that ideal. I would emphasize again, that this, with the ever-present conviction and conclusion of all his writings, that there is a moral to be drawn from the natural world as well as from man's, makes him one of the great guides of life in a society now breaking away from ancient landmarks and filled with a thousand discordant demands for reorganization. With Emerson on my shelves, I feel like saying as the doorkeeper of a rich house is instructed to say to mendicants and peddlers, "No, we have nothing to give,— we want nothing." But Emerson brings with him the best of goods

and company and is not so exclusive that he cannot bear the presence of all the immortal books ever written. I chanced to read Emerson before I knew the others and have never ceased to be thankful that I had such a guide and such a light toward the great masters of thought. In the various corners of my seaside and mountain castles, castles of one story, Emerson and his mates stand: a rather ragged regiment, with some missing who should be there; but I take care that only his equals shall be invited to share the shelves permanently.

There is one other explanation of Emerson's influence over young men, somewhat closer and more personal, which I must attempt to examine, although I fear I may not be able to make it as clear as it lies in my own mind,

inasmuch as it pertains to an inward crisis of life when it is passing from childhood to consciousness, and therefore difficult to be communicated or understood unless already experienced.

A boy's nature has a healthy imagination and spontaneous expression. It does not calculate consequences; it looks not backward nor much into its future, and is seldom introspective. If the boy declares he will be a sailor, a grocer or a soldier, it is not because he has discovered in himself a special gift for those occupations, but because of the physical attractions with which he accredits them. So at first all of his attractions and repulsions are of an outward, objective kind. Nothing as yet has appealed to his most inward nature with its faint, undefined longings. Slowly, or it may be suddenly, he awakens to the fact of

his own personality, his ego, his independent being; and he begins to note and measure its difference or sympathy with other beings. At this critical period it is of momentous consequence in what direction he is drawn; what influences, material or spiritual, are thrown into the delicate balance of his quickening tendencies. The new-found being, the exuberance of youth, usually draw men into self-enjoyment, into companionship and society and ambitions, and the integrity of the youthful, just awakened soul is dissipated and lost. One has had little chance or encouragement to keep hold of himself. On the contrary, he is discouraged; uncomfortable epithets await him, egotist, peculiar, eccentric; and at one time or another it bears the name of some discredited person or institution. All voices counsel the young

man to be like other people; to conform, to keep step or to be left behind.

At an opportune moment Emerson met the dawning consciousness and intelligence, and I doubt not continues to do so, of many young men when it must be confessed they were surcharged with the exaggerations of self-importance; when their newly discovered powers were seething in indeterminate and nebulous disorder. He impressed the importance of a man to himself and the necessity and dignity of self-reliance. Yet he directed this thought into such lofty meanings and implications as to effect the cure of egotism and pretension and open the perceptions to the required preparation for self-trust and the incoming of higher life. Moreover, he held out the hope and the promise that only in being true

to ourselves could we arrive at a real understanding of other men and discover our spiritual affinity with them as well as with nature, which is best worth knowing of anything in the world.

This was a comfortable and elevated doctrine, which so released us from the obligation of trying to know and do the thing not in harmony with our own nature and its aspiration, so freed us from conformity and tradition that we eagerly accepted it. If some were overzealous and carried the idea beyond its true scope they soon found the limitations, and within them have quietly worked out their own destiny. Wherever Emerson's teachings have found welcome among men they have been followed by saner living and nobler impulses. They have not been attended by organized institutions founded upon his name

and writings, but as he wished have entered into the life and character of individuals, until the seed is now sown broadcast and bears fruit after its kind in many sequestered as well as public places. We young men of Emerson's time, realizing our own being and its potentialities, and yet uninstructed, were turning in all directions for help. Being in a certain sense delivered from the trammels of outworn opinion, by our very aspirations which were prophetic of a new day, we found not this help in the writers of the past. Although the rules of conduct were at hand, where was the master who could lead us on, could fit himself to our special and personal need; who could give us faith in a new thought and courage to follow it and captivate us by the form of its expression? We found him in Emerson.

Such was the deep impression he made, so profoundly did it move his readers that each knew immediately this message was not for himself alone and at once was generated that sympathy which prophesies of kindred spirits and in due time is united with them.

Thus it was we came into companionship and found our own. We formed no school, but we did have a master. I see Emerson at our head, leading his extraordinary collection of boys; some over bold and opinionated, others facile and docile; some with long locks, poetic and melancholy; others eager to apply literally and at once to all existing evils the Emersonian remedies. The master has hard work to keep us in order, but he allows a considerable latitude and idiosyncrasy and is overflowing with confidence in our future. At last he leads

us smiling to the seat of the Muses and introduces us as worthy of the palm, the oak, the olive or more humble parsley.

By permission of the publishers of my Prose Idyls I add here in conclusion of these recollections a condensed, symbolic rendering of them which was written in a moment of enthusiasm when symbols and metaphors seemed best suited to shelter a personal experience.

THE MIND CURER

"It would be well," said the sage to me one day, "to go to college; it would be better to go around the world; but best of all to go look everything thou meetest with in the face and ask of it some question that is in thine own heart. If thou art patient, but withal importunate, then after many years thou wilt find the

answers written everywhere, in a pre-Cadmean alphabet," such were his very words, "over all waste places and in the dust under thy feet."

Thus spoke the sage, and many other things of similar import, speaking like the Pythoness across the centuries, regardless of age, time and circumstances.

As I had gone clandestinely, had hired a chaise and traveled twenty miles at the expense of all my substance to consult the oracle, I held it to be mine and I treasured it up for many years without comprehending it. Yet generally I felt it like Socrates' dæmon, restraining me from many things. I know not how, but the lofty words and their very vagueness elevated the soul and made it expectant of wonderful revelations. If I sought honor, ease, riches, love, something said, Seek them not!

and at length they palled before a life, not mine, but whose existence I could divine. As the astronomer knows of an unseen star by the perturbations of some other visible, so I conjectured of a higher life by the agitations, the attractions and repulsions of this.

Thus did the sage and the master of many centuries cure the uncertain adolescent mind ere yet it had reached to follies or prevented the entrance of wisdom.

EMERSON AS ESSAYIST

EMERSON AS ESSAYIST

EMERSON'S Essays are the almost unexampled instance of matter prepared for oral delivery that has a place in permanent and vital literature. I know of no other compositions save his which have stood the test of reading in private equally well with the effect of public delivery. How cold and tame seem orations and addresses when read which were heard with thunders of applause. This is partly due to the temporary or occasional topic, or to a charm of voice and magnetism of the speaker which throw so illusive a glamour over the commonplace that it shall seem extraordinary and the trivial important. Each gen-

eration reads with disappointment the greatest efforts of oratory of a previous one.

Here lies the point which distinguished Emerson from other speakers. His topics were seldom transient; they were the eternal ones of life; and he had an original manner of treatment and the literary skill which have made the Essays a lasting addition to the instruction and elevation of mankind. Dealing as he did with the eternal principles of nature, his mind became charged with a cosmical force which he manifests in his original style and in the profound treatment of his subjects. He penetrates to the essence of things and lays bare the secret operations of mind and matter. It is obvious such themes are neither gilded by the momentary enthusiasm accorded to

the orator, nor can they be stripped of their imperishable qualities when read in print. In their subsequent revision for publication something perhaps was added, but more, I think, was struck out. The concise and close statement was made more concise and close; the inadequate word or phrase gave place to the apposite. Conjunctions, adjuncts and adverbs disappeared. He retained, however, as his most convenient bridge from one paragraph to another the adverb "while" or "whilst." The metaphor was made simpler and stronger; the condensation was extreme. I remember a sentence, if so it may be called, of only two words, and it is one of the most effective in the essay in which it occurs. He was fond of the elision of the letter *i* in that convenient Protean pronoun, it; so that

"'tis" became a well-known earmark in the Emersonian academe. I do not wonder at his cutting the word, one could almost wish the elision had been complete.

Emerson trimmed and pared his sentences to the last limit; and he left to the reader the pleasant task of supplying joints and hinges and of finding or making mortises for his nicely articulated tenons. He uses a figure of speech where most writers would insert a logical demonstration, or argument or entreaty. As one reads it is equally convincing and a thousand times more agreeable; but it is hard to keep the connections, especially where the page sparkles with epigrammatic sentences. He is never satisfied unless he attaches the concrete to the most profound abstractions; until like the dreams of the

gods his visions and ideals are made real by some natural image, some actual example.

After the lecture had been newly dressed, after the excisions, the compressions, the polish, the file, something remained less impersonal, less conventionally literary, special and academic than in other English essays. I think that I can still faintly detect the air of the lecture room; the upturned faces, expecting the sentence which should cut clean, sound to the depths, soar to the heights, and never disappointed that expectation. There yet lingers over the Essays the direct address, the hortatory, the call to me, to you, which makes them so exciting and so revolutionary. He uses the first person a great deal; and one reciprocates the high compliment by believing himself alone ad-

dressed. It is like a personal interview.[1]

A veritable presence does vitalize Emerson's Essays; it is a soul informed with thought, with beauty, with experience, observation and conviction, speaking to the soul. It has drawn to itself what belonged to it, and cast out what did not. It dares to be true to itself in all subjects and always. It is as important to note the unvarying attitude of Emerson's mind as the particular expression of it. We do not know what he

[1] It is not necessary to assent to everything he says,— but all, even such as I, can understand enough to be moved to adoration and worship of the true, the beautiful and good. — *Rev. Samuel Ripley to Mary Moody Emerson in 1838.*

One person observed she durst not breathe scarcely during the whole lecture. Yet some were displeased and thought the influence he exerted not good. — *Same to same, 1838.*

may have to deliver, what surprises may be in store under any of his rubrics, but we do know that Emerson will be there. He is so self-consistent that never a doubt interferes with our certainty as to the position he will take on any public or moral or literary question.[1] We know that he could not take any other than he does. There never was any writer so forbidden by his own genius to wander outside of its own domain. He was almost imprisoned by it. In a hundred subjects and digressions there is a thread which binds all and cannot be lost. He is everywhere the same. Should a single page of Emerson be exhumed from the future ruins of modern libraries it would be enough to identify him and testify to his genius.

[1] In praising a letter of Sterling's Emerson said, "These were opinions (for which he did not care so much), *but the tone was the man.*"

Is it remarkable then that Emerson who was so one in all his work should have been so untiring a searcher after identity in the history of mankind, both outward and spiritual, and in the operations of nature? He pursued this identity not perhaps with the philosophical intent of finding a first cause, or principle, which ends often in dogma and system; but he was pleased, like a poet, with the oneness of things; the correspondences between nature and man, between matter and spirit. He saw symbols, and saw them as a never-ending and interchangeable order. He was not content with seeing likeness in one place, one time, or object, but always and everywhere. He gave the immanent spirit pervading nature and man many names, the loftiest of which was the Over Soul. It was his key with

which he opened secret and obscure passages to man and nature, and revealed them as clearly as the known and the familiar. It at once commanded a larger thought and advanced his hearers and readers into a new life. The first effect of it was practical; that is, it enticed the hearer or reader into a desire for embodiment. I assert this although aware that it was an ideal life which was endeavored to be realized; a life as yet without institutions to assist and protect it. The singular elevation of Emerson's vision enabled him to behold harmony, order and love; those in a lower atmosphere who could not bear that high light might yet, by his help, catch glimpses of the good and fair; and here and there some solitary youth attempted to conform his living and thinking to the Concord oracles. For such

youth Emerson had a great tenderness, a great sympathy and hope, believing as he did that ideas must realize themselves as surely as the acorn becomes an oak.

Emerson was an optimist because he was first an idealist; that is, he believed in the triumph of thought over the evil and brute forces in the world. He made "no account of objections which respect the actual state of the world at the present moment." "Put trust in ideas and not in circumstances." "It is the ground we do not tread upon that supports us." And I must repeat here the best saying of Emerson as illustrative of his habitual irony toward all things of matter-of-fact and practical importance: "Excuse me," he said to some friends when called away by the appearance of a load of wood in his yard, "we

have to attend to these matters just as if they were real."

Some foreign as well as some American critics of Emerson are ignorant of his influence upon the actual life of the men and women who were reading him when he was at his prime and they were in the eager and impressionable stage of youth. Although it is Matthew Arnold who has so wisely said that poetry is a criticism of life; who also notes its deep influence on readers of Wordsworth, forming the intellectual tendencies of many other poets and writers and having a subtle, far-reaching effect over literature, society and even government; yet he seems not to be aware of the similar facts in regard to Emerson's poetry and prose. They are, it is true, not so conspicuous, but they are just as real. Perhaps more of the Emersonian

seed fell into unprepared ground, into a younger civilization, a more restless generation than in the case of Wordsworth and Carlyle, and displayed itself in more crude and eccentric forms. But his teaching must not be measured by the foibles of some of its followers; every noble tree has its parasitic growths. A tree that is large and vigorous enough can sustain a good many. Time will rectify this. Wordsworth's imitators, his weaker disciples, who thought simple themes and characters as worthy of poetry as great ones and yet were too unskilled to treat them greatly, have fallen into obscurity, and only those capable of holding aloft and passing on the light they have received, remain and are remembered. It has been thus with every great teacher, every original force; and so it will be with Emerson.

When I consider Emerson from these points of view I am impatient of merely literary criticism of him. It does not compass his aims, his power and his effect. There is something in these you will not find when you only read Emerson's books as literature. There is already history in them; that is, what they contain of suggestion and aspiration has been more or less successfully put into the life of this age. Whether this will continue to be their fortune is an unimportant and also unanswerable question. In the history of most great men there has been at first a personal following, a band of disciples whose circle has extended itself in a natural manner. There happened to Emerson what usually happens to all eminent moral or literary leaders; something calling itself the public began to criticise and sneer

at those who were the earliest and warmest of Emerson's admirers, reproaching them with the intention of appropriating him exclusively to themselves, and with being blinded by their closeness to him. Though late in discovering it, and in fact by no other means than the observation of his influence and fame among a small band, this public found out that there was an Emerson, a poet, essayist or philosopher, they were not sure which. After this discovery the next step was in accordance with the most ancient precedents,— mockery of the follower and praise of the master. The public took its view and mainly its expression from the follower; but censured him as a mere satellite, from whom they pretended they would rescue the real Emerson and show that he belonged to a wider world than the Concord or

other coterie. This was the position of those who slowly and grudgingly magnified Emerson in order to belittle such as had anticipated their discoveries. "We claim Emerson for a larger banquet than yours, — too large for you; go you to the foot of the table." This is always said by those who come late to the feast. "But," said Themistocles, "they who start too late in the games are not crowned." They accepted Emerson when he began to be famous, not before; and they always found it more easy to satirize the Emersonians than to understand Emerson. This amused for awhile, and then it passed away. There are always brilliant wits who know how to present truth and its opposite in such close proximity that it is impossible to separate them, and only safe to cut the whole away and build on

another and simpler foundation. These wits wish to be thought to follow nobody; to stand as supreme critics and representative of the cosmopolitan mind. On the contrary they remind one of rows of pins on a paper, all alike, very small heads and very sharp points.

There is another class of critics who endeavor without prejudice to estimate Emerson as a writer and fix his place. Yet in forming their estimate they do not take into account his influence, both personal and literary, over his contemporaries, nor conceive how great was the spiritual awakening caused by his writings. I believe no one could know it who had not directly fallen under its immediate power. This which makes Emerson so dear to some, also renders it difficult for those who are out of sympathy with his teachings to find any

Emerson at all, any greatness, any power. Although not a professedly religious teacher, we can only compare his influence to that of one. He seldom enters upon any piece of writing as a purely intellectual exercise. To follow him then from literary standpoints is to miss his message. Yet he was literary in the special sense of that term; he never depreciated the place of the intellect, and often upheld it. He appears, however, to have been very impatient of the merely academic manner and to have subordinated both literary art and intellectual processes to a spiritual vision, which was a natural gift in him, his genius. He makes way for this always; his pen falters and the essay hesitates when this does not command him. He did not climb any height by the steps of fact and argument, but he alighted

there on the height, and descends by familiar paths, by homely illustration, proverb, practical applications to life, inverting as it were the usual order of thinking. Sometimes he stays on the summits, passing from one to another, as the higher clouds touch in their flight only the loftiest mountain peaks. All of Emerson's intrinsic greatness and power seem to me to come from the commanding place from which he begins to discuss every subject in the Essays. In other writings, as biographies annals and topics of the day, he measures men, nations, events and reforms by lifting them to the plane from whence in his more abstract compositions he is accustomed to take his flight.

Emerson's method, his intellectual or philosophical or spiritual first principles are to be found at large in his writings,

in the least as in the lengthiest. To every object in nature, to life, the mind applies itself to learn what it means. This meaning, idea or cause is more beautiful and of larger significance than the particular example of it. The meaning of a flower as drawn out in a line or poem is more impressive than the flower; the source of electricity, if we could find it, would be more wonderful than its applications. The object too often confines our attention to itself; but its idea has no limitations. The Essays of Emerson are an attempt to look into certain subjects singly; to give to each the whole mind and to receive in return the whole truth of each. The lines, the relations between them you do not get from Emerson in any capital generalization; it is found involved in the prevailing texture of every essay.

Now this involved generalization, never formal, but a sort of reappearing, flashing light, irregular and always surprising, is the very essence of Emerson's genius. It is a clear light to some; to others it is not clear at all. It is peculiar, it is individual. Drink deep or taste not the Emersonian Castalia. All his work is colored by his natural genius and character. It was novel to us who had received no education for his ideas or style. The Essays have all the qualities of new and original thinking, and therefore were not immediately and originally acceptable. We have to learn how to read, how to accept and use such writing. That we have learned so rapidly is due to the continuity of Emerson's work; to his frequent appearance before the public in lyceums and reform organizations; to the general

steadiness of his character, so that in time it became well known for what he stood; due also to his engaging manners, which sent every one to his books as soon as he had chanced to meet the man, and where the one interpreted the other; these and some ridicule and denunciation exciting a certain curiosity to know the object of them, gave an earlier and wider fame to Emerson than has been usual with writers who have dealt with high themes. However, I think there is something in the nature of illusion in the common tradition that great writers are not recognized in their own day. We flatter ourselves and measure the beginning by the end. It even makes us suspicious that no man can enjoy a great fame in his own lifetime, or immediately, and continue to have it thereafter.

Emerson found his place very early with a few readers in the United States, and with here and there one in Europe. It is now said by an English critic that Emerson has been accepted by our generation as one of its wise masters and that he does not stand in need of any interpretation, that he is his own expositor. Then as usual there follow fifty pages of exposition.

It is more than fifty years since the Essays were published; the first volume in 1841, the second in 1844. They contain what is most characteristic of Emerson and what, in one form or another, appears throughout all his subsequent publications. I think they are more read than his other works, although in the beginning they had no sale in comparison with his later books. But when people began to read the

Conduct of Life, English Traits, etc., they turned back to the Essays. Under whatever title his separate prose works appear, essays fit them best. Yet most of them were prepared for public delivery. Some profess to observe this in their style; but these are among the survivors of his former audiences, who are unable to forget the tones of voice, the manner and the total effect of the delivery. For it certainly cannot be discovered by any resemblances to writing that we do know was prepared for public delivery, which has for its prevailing qualities nothing in the least like the qualities of Emerson's page.

The old lecture platform witnessed every sort of performance with an impartial eye. It listened to eloquence, to nonsense and to thought; it was not greatly moved by any; it was, perhaps,

made a little more eager for the next lecture, which might demolish the ideas of the last. The audiences had their favorites, usually the more eloquent speakers. But it is painful to recall and still more so to read what went under the name of eloquence in Emerson's day; that which was selected for school-readers, spouted by collegians and admired by everybody.[1] I remember now with amusement the blank and confounded looks of three masters and two hundred boys when on declamation day

[1] It is remarkable how the love, he in common with the imaginative and thoughtful students of his college days had for eighteenth century eloquence, always remained, and with what delight in reminiscence, often woefully disappointed when he found the passage, he told us of the college eloquence of his day, imitating the very tones of John Everitt and some of the southerners of his time. — *Note by E. W. Emerson.*

I delivered the whole of Milton's Lycidas as my part in the exercises. The boys winked and screwed their faces, the masters shifted uneasily in their chairs, and I was too chagrined to lift up my head again for a week. I knew I had committed a horrible sin against all the gods of oratory, forensic and Fourth of July.

Being so admired, eloquent writing was the fashion; it crept into poetry. The last generation of American poets was more often eloquent than poetic. The verses are sermon, oration or narrative with capital letters and rhymes. It was a barbarian taste, now relegated to politics. Its last echo was at the consecration of the battlefield of Gettysburg, where a specimen of that kind of oratory was brought into striking comparison with a few words of thought

inflamed by the heart of Lincoln. Every one who either heard or read them both felt that the days of the conventional oration had been numbered. It was the beginning of an intellectual era in our history.

As we usually understand eloquence, it requires an occasion, when bodies of men are already excited and feel eloquently and create half the power of the orator himself. You cannot manufacture this opportunity; you cannot arise before an audience and excite the prepossessions necessary to responsive feeling. But the moral nature in men and in a less degree the intellectual, are always a prepared audience. To this Emerson addressed himself; and he at length secured its attention. He offered to it matter which, after having been illuminated by his voice and literary

style, was of that force and beauty to instruct and delight as much when read as when heard. The essay was as good as when it was a lecture; and to follow it one step farther, it still retained its characteristics when it took the form of poetry; for often Emerson's poetry repeats his prose. Nothing in Emerson is more plain than the unity of his work, and its similarity under whatever form or title. What he saw and so constantly reiterated as the secret of creation, the relation of nature to man, and of man to spirit he discovered in his own being. Identity of being, under diversity of form, was his constant text. Emerson is the supreme analogist of modern or ancient times. It is always the same, whether sketching the history of Concord or the intuitions of the soul. If there be any narrowness in his mind or

fault in his expression it is the repetition of this majestic idea. Yet how inevitable, how necessary, it is that men who are prophets of the soul, who have a vital message to deliver, should proclaim at all times their one idea, one doctrine in manifold forms and in every shape that can appeal to the imagination or the interests of mankind.

There was between the essay and lecture little to distinguish them save those things which belonged to the physical presence of Emerson. A strong personality pervades the Essays. It produces even yet something of the effect of the living accents. The effect of both was similar; it was not exactly enthusiasm which they elicited, but an inward excitation, almost a tumult in young and serious minds. They wished to realize these fine ideas; they looked

into nature with a new eye; they retired more from society, left off going to church, having experienced religion; and their tastes in reading became wonderfully changed. They sought after books that contained thought. At that time most young men who wished to be writers were forming themselves upon the "icily regular, splendidly null" periods of the Edinburgh Reviewers. The style of Emerson was captivating; or was it style? I ask because some denied to him style and said that to call it so was to forget all precepts and precedents. I shall not enter into this, a question for the critics, since I have already taken the ground that the Essays have a higher quality than the merely literary. Something there was in the sentences, often in the words themselves, which captivated the ear;

but examined more nearly, it was the poetic or spiritual sense they conveyed. Emerson proceeds by a series of mental saltations. He has the appearance of neglecting the connecting links of which most writers are studious and careful. The construction is asyndetic ; the sentences approach but they do not touch. Commonplace and padding are omitted. One needs to take long breathings in reading the Essays, and make a fresh start at every new chapter. These thoughts are precious pearls of translucent, yet self-contained light. Intermediate ideas are left out, — left for the reader to discover ; these are the work of the will, of the pen guided by examples and the desire not only to supply to men their ideas, but to do all the necessary thinking about them, draw all the important deductions and leave no pas-

sage unfortified, in short, nothing for the reader to do. But Emerson's view of men was that they were wiser than they knew; that it was not necessary to feed them forever on porridge and keep them in primer and pupilage. To reason, to explain, to persuade was condescension, an implied superiority. As you appeal to them, such you will find them. His doctrine of intuitions led him to address men as if they would respond intuitively to the truth; and he spoke to them always from a lofty ground.[1] No books take so much for granted in men, show such ingenuous

[1] This is the more remarkable when one remembers that they were first read to audiences in country towns and prairie settlements as well as to half philistine audiences in cities. How well it worked, this taking people by their best handles, I tried to illustrate in my memoir of my father by the story of Ma'am Bemis, who understood no word, but got the lesson from the tone and attitude of the man,—

confiding of inmost thought and assume that they are open to all that is great and beautiful as Emerson's. It was a magnificent compliment; it was the manner of kings and princes to each other. Where had he learned it? In the royal company of the sages and saints of all lands, and in the heart of woman.

One woman at least, Mary Moody Emerson, had an immense influence over him in the formation of his youthful conduct and ideals. She was a person who had the strongest convictions and the most courageous manner of express-

and wouldn't miss a lecture. The amazement and puzzling of Carlyle and Sterling and others in England as to what kind of an audience such things could be addressed to and find a response is always very amusing to me, as is also the question what they would have made out of a Lowell, or Prairie du Chien, or Harvard (Mass.) audience if they had been present. — *Note by E. W. Emerson.*

ing them; she neither argued nor persuaded, but affirmed and insisted and laid her high commands upon her young nephew with the absoluteness and confidence of an inspired prophetess. Such she was, in truth. And if we are thankful for the existence of Emerson we must also be grateful that he had her for a guide and exemplar. He has himself acknowledged his indebtedness in these words: "It was the privilege of certain boys to have this immeasurably high standard indicated to their childhood; a blessing which nothing else in education could supply."

Here are some of the standards to which he refers: "Scorn trifles." "Lift your aims." "Do what you are afraid to do." "Sublimity of character must come from sublimity of motive."[1]

[1] See Emerson's sketch of Miss Emerson; also the poem "The Nun's Aspiration."

He had anticipated the cathode ray and looked into the hearts and heads of men.

He modestly claimed only to have "overheard things" in the woods and fields. The same confession Thoreau makes in his verse:

"Listening behind me for my wit."

And we all had the same experience in the days of the Great Awakening; we thought we overheard things in nature and in ourselves.

A man who had such faith in humanity must have acquired it by finding in himself a quick perception of the best in others. He had learned it negatively also by observing on what a low plane men address each other, especially in religion and morals, referring everything to sources and supports outside of themselves. He taught self-reliance and led

the way. He believed in the guidance of the intuitions, and that errors and inconsistencies which might be sometimes the consequence of this belief were from the very nature of their origin self-corrective. It was Burns's paradox —

> " the light that led astray
> Was light from heaven."

If Emerson, too, never falters in his good hopes for sinners, how much more confidence must he have in the honest, self-reliant search for the right way. Moreover, whatever wayward, irregular and contradictory lines might mark the track of man through life, he believed they were rounded in by a circle whose center was love, never forfeited, and whose circumference was law, all-restraining.

I gather from Emerson that the chief means to intuitions is right living; keep

the senses clear and unperverted; see with your own eyes, hear with your own ears. Man is an imitative animal commonly; catch him if you can when he is not, and you will come nearer to his intrinsic nature. Man uses a vast quantity of paint and wears many garments in the effort to unite himself to his kind. We learn our lessons together; first in the family, then at school, then in society. Try to pierce through all this, whose prime object is to do what has been done and to know what is known, and wherein it is fatal for the soul to rest. Seek to advance through this elementary state, which is only preparatory and defensive, like the cocoon, but in which the wings never can expand. Advance, and be a person, and add something to life. If there be anywhere another person, he can help

you; even his record is a help. What the poets and wise men have sung and pictured, that be. Do not let ideals rest in the realms of fancy. Ideals are the prophetic shadows of the real, or the hallowed memories of what has been, of what may be again if believed in and aspired after. The thing you think of, dream of and never give up will come to pass, because it is not yourself alone that desires and believes; it is a great moving stream that has caught you in its currents and bears upon its bosom the gifts you seek.

Emerson states in many forms the ideal and spiritual laws of life. Like a wise doctor, he has left us many directions on lesser matters: how to come into true insights, how to employ them, how to preserve them, and how to recognize them in others. On this latter

point he is very full and emphatic. The benefit of human intercourse is in the desire and effort to listen for the higher voice in men; if possible to draw it out, to challenge it, to show it courtesy and honor; "to converse and to know," as Plato said. Emerson's voice at first was solitary and remote, the voice of one crying in the wilderness. His first essay, the little volume entitled Nature, although in prose, is pure poetry, and is as unlike the literature of the time as the Vedas. At length having attained to speak the thoughts of his more thoughtful contemporaries, he received from them many additions and illustrations which wonderfully enlarged the circle of his vision.

I have in previous pages described his personal manner toward a guest or friend as that of expectation. It was very

provocative. Rarely before had one been so encouraged to speak his inmost thought; rather the effect of human intercourse had been to silence it and substitute what other men were thinking. My companions and myself felt that our education thus far was mere absorption of lifeless knowledge. The fruit of Emerson's receptive attitude toward his contemporaries, and I may say, toward all the intellectual legacies of the past appears in the Essays. They are rich in wisdom, old as time; enriched and refreshened with contributions such as every new age furnishes, overlooked by the serene and penetrating eye of genius.

It is not easy to draw lines through the Essays, or to classify his ideas. Emerson's mind was excursive; and if there be one definition more than another that fits the vague title of essay, it is perhaps

excursive. As Lowell said of Theodore Parker's sermons —

> " His hearers can't tell you on Sunday beforehand
> If in that day's discourse you'll be Bibled or Koraned,"

so in the Essays of Emerson you are not sure what ideas you will meet under the titles of History, Self-Reliance, Wealth, Circles, etc. It is one of their charms, the surprises. I suppose the professors of English would not teach their pupils to write in that manner. They would instruct them to cogitate connections and logical order. Emerson's page is often oracular and epigrammatic. The wisdom of the ancients as it has come down to us seems fragmentary, as if something had dropped out; in Emerson it appears voluntarily left out. But what can be said after an epigram?

Nothing but another epigram. Anything else seems tame and dull. You are lifted up, and then you fall. Oh, for a glimpse of those links which mankind persists in believing make a chain. Emerson wrote from the imagination, from remembered gleams and visits of a spiritual vision; and it is said, largely from notebooks containing miscellaneous thoughts. To give form to these, to make an integral structure was not possible without a constructive faculty. There is a place for everything in a drama, an epic or novel. A constructive mind resolves its materials. Emerson got together vast collections, singly beautiful and valuable; and some he happily wrought into fair and perfect forms. The remainder he generously left for us to assort as we could.

It is well known how Goethe's col-

lections overflowed, beyond his creative power; how he built a roof over some, —a mere shed for storage; and others he thrust into various previously completed houses, all for temporary convenience and lodgment. Emerson appears to me sometimes like a rich family with magnificent furniture, but with no house in which to display it. He was apt to move it about from one place to another, from one lecture to another, then into the essay; and some precious pieces he left standing alone, like statues, with only the light of heaven for their protection, wonderful sentences, quite self-substantial, yet how much more impressive if placed in some noble temple. I have often wished that Emerson had left off preaching and had created a work of art that would have itself preached. In reading him I cannot admire variously enough;

there is not sufficient opportunity for beholding beauty, form, proportion in the organization of his materials. They are too abstract, too absolute. We long for some embracing, concrete form; for embodiment, for incarnation, so that through his mouth should have spoken a hundred men and women. Am I asking for a mine when I already have more jewels than I can wear? Yes, it is true; it is true that when we find greatness in a man it creates an appetite for the greater.

There are certain of Emerson's earlier Essays that when I read I feel myself an auditor in a vast temple, with one voice resounding, distant and solemn, and calling upon me to be a god. Or, it is as if in Hamlet or Prometheus none but Hamlet and Prometheus should speak. The splendid sentences exhilar-

ate and fill me with a dazzling sense of my own possibilities. I read one and a second, and at the third I am intoxicated and pack my trunk at once for Utopia. Emerson mingles no water in his wine. His great soul never condescended to qualify, to concede, to write down. It is difficult to maintain the elevation so easy to attain while reading Emerson's page. The moment we leave it there is danger of a tumble. Therefore a wise and moderate morsel at one time is best. Like our prayers, we should come to it in the right mood; then there will be a response of more lasting effect.

The study of the Essays is an excellent preparation for reading the masterpieces of all literatures. It opens and prepares the mind for greatness of every kind. In particular his admiration of the noble actions of men, whether real

or those imagined by poets and dramatists, is inspiring and contagious. He was the literary as well as spiritual magician of his time. He had a sure scent for the excellent in every department of man's activities; in biographies, in wars, in science, in poetry. The mere enumeration of the names of great men and of heroic deeds is to us when young very enkindling; and Emerson was fond of repeating long lists of these in an allusive and attractive way. In fact, it was rather the fashion among the original Transcendentalists. It was the same in regard to all famous books. I suppose there is no studious reader whose first impulse on hearing of one is not to procure and read it immediately; and we must credit Emerson with promoting the taste for the best literature and improving the whole literary tone of the

country. This, however, was only a minor and incidental effect of his writing; but it served to keep the somewhat sublimated thought and spiritual air of the time from becoming unhealthy and narrow.

It seems sometimes as though Emerson in the Essays had set out to distill the essence of libraries into a page; pages into a sentence; the sentence into a phrase, the phrase to a word. This design, this intellectual habit is the very opposite of the creative and constructive mind. Perhaps some sentences from Joubert, a French writer of *Pensées*, will best describe one feature of Emerson as a writer. These sentences are from a chapter entitled by Joubert, "The author painted by himself."

"It is my province to sow, but not to build or found."

"I am like an Aeolian harp that gives out certain fine tones but executes no air."

"It will be said that I speak with subtlety. This is sometimes the sole means of penetrating that the intellect has in its power; and this may arise from the nature of the truth to which it would attain, or from that of the opinions, or of the ignorance through which it is reduced painfully to open for itself a way."

"It is not my periods that I polish, but my ideas. I pause until the drop of light of which I stand in need is formed and falls from my pen."

This last expression seems to define not only Emerson's literary habit, but also his waiting upon the moment of inspiration. His will was exercised in the work of preparing himself for this moment, in making his windows clear and

leaving open his doors. His attitude toward his own mind and perceptions was distinctly religious. "Our thought is a pious reception," he says. The god of thought, the Muse, will enter if you are not too impatient, if you will not stand in your own light, if you do not wrap yourself in creeds and customs. "Ideas come when it pleases them, not when it pleases me," said Rousseau. Emerson taught this as literary ethics, and the Essays are an example of the fruits of its practice. He listened for the still small voice, supposed hitherto to speak only in Hebrew and Greek and from Asia. He announced that it could be heard in America and to-day, and that it now spoke English. Its chief difficulty for us is that it continues to be small and still, while we want the large and explosive.

I have said that Emerson constantly inculcates right living as the means to intellectual and spiritual insights. Perhaps one-half of the Essays concerns the statement of what forms his highest ideals of life; and the other half of the conduct necessary to realize them. In the latter he descends to many particulars, and shows that common sense and shrewd, homely wisdom for which he has been much praised. It made some of his later Essays almost popular. They were even commended in Boston and New York, and by such reputable citizens as Messrs. Hard and Long Head. "Our daughters, sir, have understood you for a long time back; but we have never paid much attention until lately; now we begin to find you comprehensible; a good Yankee, too, and we hear you are a man of some property and of a

first-rate family." True, we are never allowed to forget that Emerson was descended from seven New England ministers, while the remnant of us and our ancestors kept shop or raised corn; yet such was the force and circumstance of New England blood that however ethereal it became it was never quite alienated from the counter and the farm, or however earthy, it had yet its Sabbath of transcendental moods. And what pleases the heart of the bourgeois most is that Emerson took care of his property and increased it. He was no crazy poet or reformer, living in the woods or an attic, or worse, upon his friends. One is allowed to preach almost any kind of destructive or lofty notion in New England, provided he do it behind a respectable life, a house, a lineage, a black coat and bank stock.

But let us see what were Emerson's maxims, to be gathered from the Essays, for the life requisite to procure intellectual light and the power to communicate it to other men. Respect the senses, the avenues of much knowledge; there is an inevitable contest whether the body shall possess the soul, or the soul the body; man must know and command the inclinations of each. Live with nature as much as possible; it corrects the social life. Walk in the woods and by the river; avoid the highways; they have a definite destination. Consider the pine trees and their Sibylline voices. Purify yourself with ideal meditation. Follow your instincts. Write "whim" over your lintel, to humor the world; but do not believe it to be such yourself. Do not conform, nor make laborious effort to be consistent; expect

to be misunderstood for awhile. "Break up the tiresome old heavens,"—here I quote one of his best quotations,—which expresses the effort of every master and the unspoken heart of youth. Eat, drink temperately; use indulgences and luxuries moderately; taste the cup, do not drain it; smoke half a cigar. One end of it is stimulating and social, the other is narcotic and silencing. Gratify, but not like the beasts, your special appetites and inclinations,—even pie was made to be eaten. "Let the divine part be upward, and the region of the beast below." You cannot always drive out the devil at will and at once; but make no bargains with him. Do not argue, but affirm; the argument may be sound, but the higher reason is sounder. Sleep much; we are born again in solid sleep, and dreams teach us something. Use the

morning hour. Prize the transient illuminations of your own mind, and "thoughts of things which thoughts but tenderly touch." Do not be ambitious of gain or place. Love the spot where you are, and the friends God has given, and be sure to expect everything good of them. Keep the mind open and the heart sincere. These things do and you may wait hopefully for the god of intuitions in yourself, and hear him more clearly in your fellow beings. For intuition is not that narrow doctrine of hearing only what God says to you, but the presence of God when he communicates himself through any human being.

The dæmon in man, as described by Emerson, is a more active, energizing and versatile spirit than that of Socrates, which was only restraining. Emerson's is the last fruit of the spirit of Christianity

and the general wisdom of ancient and modern ages, affirming that there is something divine and immortal in man, and that it has a voice both corrective and suggestive, heard not once for all, or mediately, but always and by each person for himself. He is the only ancient or modern writer who continuously and with emphasis has taught this doctrine without attaching to it some article of external faith, or building upon it a system of formal philosophy. His contribution to our faith, the enlargement and purifying of it, is in the direction of ethics; and to philosophy in the observation of the working of his own mind.

The question often recurs whether what Emerson observed in himself and delivered with such confidence is true for all men. Time will sift and discriminate his work; happily there are ever

those who anticipate its verdict. His manner was oracular, and he affirmed more than he denied. Idealist and optimist as he was, his affirmations are in their nature incomplete; but they are dearest to the heart of man, the best guide, the end toward which we strive, Good and Beauty. Keep the eye fixed upon them and we grow into their likeness. His highest act of faith was in believing that evil had no real existence. In evolution the strongest survive; in morals the best; in beauty the most beautiful. Culture is the means to this end in the individual. Consoling doctrine, but requiring an almost godlike repose and elevation.

The essay is not one of the grand forms of literature; the content is all that can give to it value or beauty. It is a plain roof, covering, it may be,

emptiness or magnificent properties. Its brevity is convenient. It is a way of delivering yourself when you do not know what else to do with what you have, or possess no gift for invention or construction. In the essay you experiment; you fish in any water. Montaigne's net took in everything; Bacon's, only the larger game, suitable to set before princes and men of affairs. Emerson's style is like Bacon's in some respects; yet not so colorless and strained of personality; while on the other hand he is not so whimsical and not so discursive as Montaigne. In the essay you see what can be said, not what must be said in order that a final and prepared effect may be produced, as in the drama and novel. You draw around the topic from many sources things associated in your own mind, not in the general mind and

expectation. Embellishment and illustration are supplied by miscellaneous reading; but most of all it is a receptacle for those scattered observations of life, nature and experience which want a thread and would be lost if left singly and unset. Pins and needles go to waste without a cushion. Prepare a place for things and things find it. Good writers like good housekeepers can at length find a use for everything, and do save all.

Emerson rarely writes on a temporary theme. One looks in vain to fix upon some points of departure and arrival, some immaturity and maturity, some youth and age, some greenness and ripening in his genius and productions. If these were in the man they do not appear in his work. He has no youthful manner; he began with the style and almost the grasp which

he retained throughout. He began with great and well-worn subjects; he began with conciseness, with an imaginative treatment, with a style not formed on models or by practice; but it seems like the transcript of a mind already long accustomed to a certain inward and silent expression of itself. This is why we feel it so near to our own experience; it seems written out of the same. When he began to write and publish he left behind him the steps by which he had gained his position. As far as his message had importance, his style any charm, or his personality impressiveness, they were the same at first as at last. It is vain to complain of want of completeness, want of logic and connection; he is what he is. We cannot say these are matters of indifference; but we can say that a man must observe them no longer

than they help him; and that the greatest minds are superior to them, violate precedents and authorities and create the rules by which they are to be read. "When what you read elevates your mind and fills you with noble aspirations, look for no other rule by which to judge the book; it is good and is the work of a master-hand."

A few sentences of unclassical Greek have moved and filled the world for eighteen centuries. Many of the favorite passages of literature will hardly bear analysis, and none are more easily burlesqued. Emerson was a careful composer; but it would appear that it extended not much further than sentences; to make them short, and then make another. And so he adds thought to thought on the page. Their connection it has been wittily said, is to be

found in God,— what better place! In the lecture-room he paid his audiences the compliment of appearing to think before them. Old Sojourner Truth once said to an anti-slavery convention before which she arose to speak, "You have come here to hear what I am going to say; and I have come here for the same purpose." This was something the same feeling one had when Emerson arose, hesitated, seemed to be totally unprepared, to be fumbling for the right thing to say. Was this nature or art? It certainly was very exciting to a sympathetic audience and doubled the effect of his master strokes. These always announced themselves beforehand. It was like the flash of a cannon; it was seen before it was heard.

In the Essays, a certain fine and noble spirit colors all that is there writ-

ten. I have often felt it to be like the tone of his voice in the lecture-room, which commended everything it delivered. Whatever passages or verse of other writers he introduced seemed more beautiful than in their own place. As was said of the Rev. J. S. Buckminster, a former famous Boston clergyman, when it was his turn to read the contributions of a certain literary club of that city,—"when Buckminster reads all the compositions are good."

Emerson was a scholar in the general sense of that title, although he made no additions to any special department. But he upheld the scholar's vocation, and celebrated it much in prose and verse. His appreciation of the studies of other men in all fields of knowledge was generous and quick. In the form in which he chose to express himself, the essay, it

was easy and fitting to embody by illustration and reference the results of the labors of others, and to take up the interesting fragments of special studies. He detected these, the universal element in particular discoveries, the gems of wisdom and wit, by an infallible instinct. His mind held an antidote to specialism, and yet was its best interpreter. His prophetic imagination was coincident with some of the experimental revelations of modern science. The higher regions of science depend upon imagination as much as poetry and art depend upon it. Every law must be felt before it is arrived at by the understanding and evidence; that is its necessity. But undoubtedly you must be looking intently in its direction.

Morals would be as appropriate a title for Emerson's Essays as for Plutarch's;

the actual contents covered by it being similar, the search for the beautiful and the good. The title is only a little more loose and vague than the matter. The essay shows a man's reading it is said; but in what the essayist appropriates there is revealed the same characteristic as in that which is original. What he quotes is the same as what he invents. "Let them perish who have said the same things before." The points of light are refocused and sent forward again.

There is room in essay writing to say what comes into the head; but then there must be a head. Emerson read more than he studied, and thought more than he wrote, so that there is great compression and conciseness in the Essays. They are convenient to quote. I frequently see in the newspapers his phrases

and even whole sentences uncredited. Thus always language and literature are fed involuntarily from higher springs.

As on the platform Emerson seemed often to be searching for the right word or idea, almost admitting the hearer to his mental processes, so on the page of the Essay there is revealed the active principle of thought. He appears to leave out so much that he flatters us with the feeling that he is merely making memoranda for us to complete. He touched, but did not stay, on a thousand subjects; but he left them illuminated; there are diamond-like gleams on the pages, concentrations of wit and wisdom, something for all moods and experiences.

I think the obscurities, or what some complain of as a want of cohesion and logical sequence in Emerson's Essays

may be partly explained as an impatience of the commonplace, of the smooth, facile style which turns itself round and round a subject, lingering over an idea until it is so comminuted that its force is lost. It covers the page, it does not fill it. There is no forward movement; it begins but does not arrive. There are long pauses between Emerson's sentences. Their brilliance, their power and suggestion are often in these intervals. Ordinary punctuation is inadequate for their indication. Stop, reader, and think; reflect as he is doing; let not the stimulated imagination be embarrassed by the want of logic; let it leap this barrier and know that the relations of things can often be more truly seen in the mind's illumination than in that of rhetorical order. Emerson does not weary you with all that can be said in

the spaces between his texts; but after long thinking he writes another text,—another bead on the string which when full will be hidden. Should it break or seem weak, no matter; the beads are the value, not the string. The verses of the Bible are as good out of it as in it. The brightest gems of all literatures are some oft-quoted sentences, lines, fragments of an enormous mass of material put together in structures that have nothing else save these to preserve them.

In his way Emerson was a writer very careful about form and style. I have heard that when he turned a lecture into an essay, or prepared any piece of writing for publication, he called it giving it a Greek dress. It is Greek, but seldom of Athens; it is Spartan, Laconian. As Sparta only permitted poetry in war songs, so Emerson's is strictly confined

to the moral. He knew that it was not enough to have good thoughts; that the gods must not be without suitable temples. He was conscious, like Plato, that writing is the grave of thought; that in the attempt at expression it becomes sometimes altogether illusive, flat and nothing; while before the pen is taken in hand it allures us with the most beautiful hopes.[1] Let us then put thought to the test; and what by ever intending, repeated effort will not take perfect form, let us reject. Emerson observed these principles of literary art, not in

[1] In a letter to Sterling, Emerson wrote, "All thoughts are holy when they come floating up to us in magical newness from the hidden life, and 'tis no wonder we are enamored and love-sick with these until in our devotion to particular beauties and in our efforts at artificial disposition we lose somewhat of our universal sense and the sovereign eye of Proportion."

grand forms but in the polish and elaboration of the separate parts.

The Essays contain the harvests of Emerson's lifetime; plain food for daily life, rare fruit and dainties for life's holidays. The quality is as the product of the sun's light and warmth; the form is spontaneous and simple, and everywhere expressive of the man. He wrote when he felt inspired; when not, he sought in right living and high thinking the renewal of the sources of inspiration.

The reserve of Emerson's Essays is is one of their most notable and instructive characteristics. He sees more than he says. He is like a general overlooking the field of battle, determining the strategical points and concentrating his forces upon them. What he does not heed is not important for a comprehension and complete grasp of the situation.

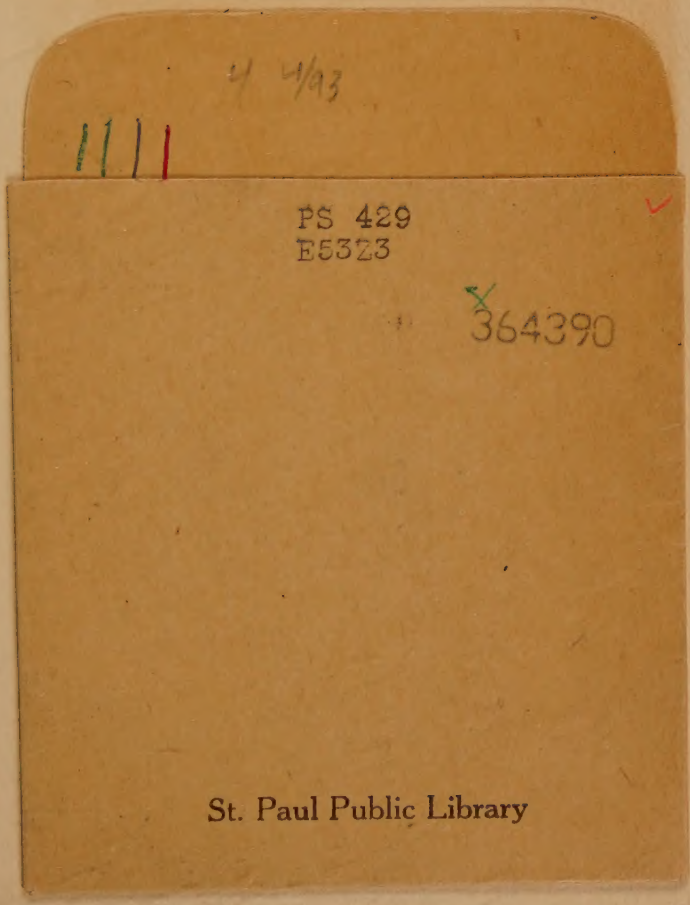
Some have complained that one might read the Essays as well backward as forward and with equal profit and understanding. Then read them so, I advise. Either way it is impossible to miss their message. The reserves of Emerson are a tribute to the reader. He does not put him to sleep with faultless but empty periods. He stirs him with sallies of thought or wit or expression. An index to his writings would probably fill as many volumes as the writings themselves. He has some good thought in terse and memorable phrase on every subject that interests humanity. The connection may not be with each other; look out for it in your own thinking. The stars shine far apart, nor otherwise would their shining be so apparent and impressive; yet who can doubt the interstellar spaces are also full of light and

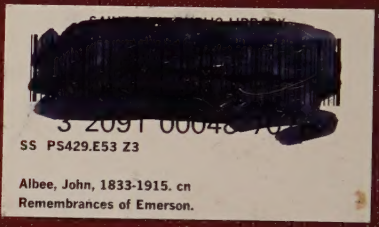
beauty? So Emerson's sentences often rise on our skies, sometimes cold and glittering, sometimes warm and palpitating, yet always reminders of the infinite worlds beyond them, the worlds where the souls of men are one with the spirit of truth, of beauty and holiness.

OCT 12 1916

SEP 29 1960

Four Weeks Book
Saint Paul Public Library




SS PS429.E53 Z3

Albee, John, 1833-1915. cn
Remembrances of Emerson.

Saint
Paul
Public
Library